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MYSELF WHEN YOUNG

ALEC WAUGH

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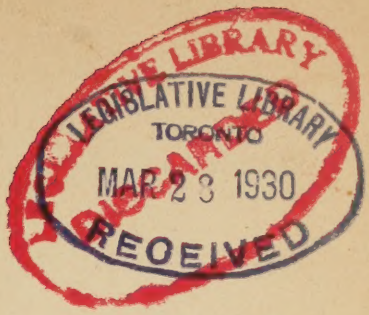
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MYSELF WHEN YOUNG

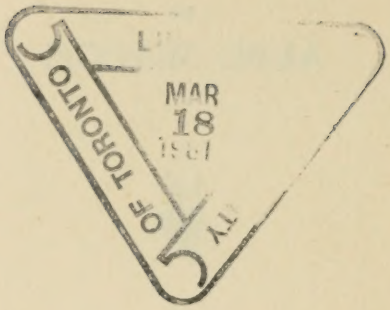
CONFESSIONS

BY

ALEC WAUGH

85940

LONDON
GRANT RICHARDS LTD.
ST MARTIN'S STREET
1923



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FOR

MY MOTHER

TO WHOM I FIRST SPOKE OF IT

WITH MY LOVE

I

IF the majority of one's friends live in Kensington and Bloomsbury, and if one is fond of going out to parties in the evening, then one should live somewhere midway between these two extremities of charm and culture. With the acceptance of each fresh invitation, I am led increasingly to appreciate that there is no stronger deterrent to one's enjoyment of an evening than the knowledge that one has at the end of it to get to Golders Green. However agreeable the company, however profuse the hospitality, there must always come that moment when one is forced to weigh the expense of a taxi against the degree of entertainment likely to be derived from a refusal to be disturbed by the sirens of the last tube.

It is twenty-five minutes past twelve; in thirteen minutes the shutters of Warren Street Station will be down. You rise from your cushioned comfort. You inform your hostess that it is very late, that you are very busy just now, that you have to be up early in the morning, that you really feel that the time has come. But you rarely complete your explanations. "Oh, but no, really; must you?" she says. "Surely you can stay a little longer. I'm expecting 'so-and-so' and 'so-and-so' any moment now. They promised

faithfully they would come. They'll be frightfully disappointed if they find you have gone." Your vanity arrays itself before your prudence. You remind yourself that a taxi will only cost ten shillings; you consider with what speed, with the writing of how few extra words you will be able to earn that sum next morning; you remember a copy-book platitude about a ship and a small amount of tar; you vacillate; and whichever way you decide, eventually you will come to regret your choice. If you stay it is more than likely that the owners of the distinguished names that were dangled as a bait in front of you will never come at all; or, if they do, they will arrive exhausted from some previous entertainment, and will sit silent and unapproachable in a corner. There is a strong probability that the last syphon will be discovered to be finished. Certainly by half-past one you will be in no humour to exchange with the taxi-driver those formalities of reluctance and solicitation that are forced on everyone who lives north of the Marlborough Road.

Wearily will you say to him "145 North End Road." "Fulham?" will be his answer. "Golders Green," will you snap back at him. "Oh, sir!" and he will tell you how late it is, how cold he is, and that he has got to get back to Balham or Brixton or Upper Clapton. One day I think I shall say "Fulham" for the mere pleasure of learning that taximeter cabriolets can be parked at Barnet or Finchley or St Albans. In the end, as always, you assure him that you will make it worth his while; and as you sink back into the ill-sprung, ill-cushioned seat you wonder what folly has persuaded

you to stay that extra hour; you reflect on the disinclination with which you will settle down to work next morning; you ponder the slump of the literary market and the extreme difficulty of making it yield sustenance; you ask yourself by what right you chose to spend ten shillings on a journey that you could have made for fourpence; thus you remind yourself did the hero of your last story set in motion that process of reckless degeneration the details of which you so masterfully exposed.

Nor, though you will be the richer by nine and eightpence, will you be any less the victim of self-criticism, should you catch the 12.38 from Warren Street. As you pull wearily up the North End Road, you will be assailed by all those arguments that, had you stayed, you would in the taxi have exposed to high derision.

And it was in such a mood, after such a decision, on a wet, breathless January evening that I walked homewards past the few melancholy trees that were once part of the proud avenue down which Dick Turpin cantered plunderwards. Why, I asked myself, had I yielded to those instincts of economy that are the only heritage with which my Scots ancestry has thought prudent to endow me; why, for the sake of a few pennies had I deserted the party at the very moment when it was about to become genuinely amusing. Parties are like bonfires: they smoulder wretchedly for a couple of hours; they emit columns of malodorous, unsightly smoke; then suddenly, gloriously, unexpectedly, they burst into a splendour of leaping flame. Such a transformation had been, I now felt,

about to enshrine that party for all time in the memory of those present at the very moment when I had decided to desert it. Harold Scott had just arrived from the Everyman Theatre. And than Harold Scott there are few persons who can be, when he so desires, more cheering and more exhilarating. He had regaled himself, not inappropriately, as he had been that evening impersonating Feste, with a stoup of wine, had been led to the piano, and had struck the first chords of "Another Little Job for the Tombstone Maker." It was a song of which the fame and the refrain had often reached me, the words never: and why, I asked myself, had I allowed to pass so agreeable an opportunity of making their acquaintance. In a mood, therefore, of uncomfortable self-depreciation, cautiously, so that the dog might not bark and awake the household, I opened the front door, to find on the hat cupboard below the window a letter addressed to me in a bright green envelope.

There is only one person who writes to me in bright green envelopes, and I never see that handwriting without a thrill. Whatever else may in time pass from memory, it is improbable that I shall ever forget the excitement which I felt when, for the first time, I saw that handwriting, and read in the left hand of the envelope the words "Grant Richards Ltd." I was at Sandhurst at the time, and the day had begun unfortunately. I had appeared on early parade without a lanyard, and had been requested to appear after breakfast at Company Office. I was, indeed, waiting in the passage to be marched before the Major

when the mail arrived, and among the letters flung haphazardly on the table of the ante-room was the one telling me that my first book had found a publisher. At such a moment I should with equanimity have accepted any punishment with which the authorities might have thought well to chasten me ; but even then I could not help reading into my dismissal, without the reprimand that would have suspended my week-end leave, a happy augury for my book. And after six years a green envelope is still for me a symbol of romance ; the miracle may be repeated. I am not of a particularly credulous nature, but I always half expect to find there some equally sensational announcement ; and on this grey January evening my dissatisfaction was by the sight of it instantly and marvellously removed.

The letter contained, however, no reckless offer for film rights from America ; merely an encouraging inquiry about my new novel. " Soon," it said, " we shall be preparing our spring and summer list. Can you not at least give us the title of your book ? " My dissatisfaction returned. My novel was little nearer its last chapter than it had been when I had discussed its prospects three months earlier with Grant Richards. That is the worst of a creative as opposed to a routine publisher. You have had an admirable lunch ; you sit back in a deep and comfortable arm-chair ; you smoke a good Egyptian cigarette ; a fire is blazing merrily in front of you ; your eyes are wooed pleasantly by Sancha's frescoed decoration, by the photographs on the mantelpiece and walls of those whose names have from time to time appeared among your publisher's

announcements, and among which you are pleased to observe your own conspicuously displayed: you feel content, in harmony, reassured. You begin to talk of your new novel. In this pleasant atmosphere it becomes suddenly very real to you.

"Splendid! splendid!" says Grant Richards; "now, you'll let me have that in time for the spring, won't you?" He stands with his back to the fireplace, adjusts his monocle, and begins to tell you of the artist who will design the wrapper, of the cloth in which it will be bound, of the type in which it will be printed, of the special instructions he will give his travellers. You leave his study feeling that your book is finished; that in a few days it will be presented to an enraptured world. Your imagination is already carrying you to your club and opening newspaper after newspaper over which you bow before a volley of critical applause. You discover through fuddled channels of mental mathematics the extent of the fortune that is to be yours, and, on the strength of it, you proceed to order two new suits of clothes. Then you go home, and you accept an invitation to a party, and you play football, and you review a book, and you read a few manuscripts at your office, and you turn into a short story an anecdote you overheard at your club; and in six months' time you find your novel where you left it, your tailor's bill in front of you, and your royalties account crippled by a process of diminishing returns.

Regretfully I replaced the letter in its bright green envelope. There were still a few coals glowing in my study grate; the room was warm and kindly and

sympathetic. The sky-blue walls with the deep black line running round the door and beneath the ceiling, the long low tier of bookshelves which had wooed me so often from my work, the black framed etchings of Nevinson and Wadsworth, the two water colours by Prout, the patterned tiling of the fireplace, and that dazzling screen by Roger Fry which I had bought at the Omega workshop sale with such thrilled misgiving and which has since taken its place so unobtrusively against a background of many coloured volumes; every book and ornament and picture in the room where I had wasted so many hours seemed to welcome me with a smile of affectionate indulgence. "It does not matter," they seemed to say. "You have been very happy among us—all those hours passing from one book to another, from one chain of memories to another. You have idled away, doubtless, a deal of time in our company, but it was so that we would have you be, and for all we know you may be the richer for that idleness, richer than if you had pursued, as you had intended, with eyes riveted on the green baize of your desk, the fortunes of your really rather dismal heroine!"

Our study, because it is an expression of ourself, our taste, our personality, becomes at times as reassuring, as persuasive, as that rascally confidante of introspection—a friend whom we can persuade to view our failings through our own eyes and in terms of our own conscience.

I made up the fire, turned up the switch of my electric-lamp, drew my arm-chair within the narrow circle of

its light, and paused to wonder with what book, with what companion, I should spend the hour or so before I should be tired enough to go to bed. At such an hour one cannot choose a book from the shelves haphazardly and allow it to evoke its own particular series of emotions. The book must suit the mood, must fit it as the words of a song fit the accompaniment. The varied incidents of the day, the people we have seen and spoken to, the words we have written and read, have created little by little the nature and intensity of the state of mind that is upon us at this late hour.

Slowly I ran my eye along the shelves. There in the corner of the wall were the novels, marshalled like soldiers on parade, an even row, with their plain cloth bindings and ink lettering—serviceable stuff for the most part ; fashioned to supply a want ; strong enough to resist a six months' battery on the shelves of Smith's and Boot's and Mudie's, and flimsy enough to sink afterwards, without too great resistance, into coverless, dog-eared decomposition. Next to them the taller, prouder, more exclusive demy octavos ; the gleaming white backs of the George Moore limited edition ; the slim, calf-bound Maupassants ; the heavy, formidable works of reference and criticism ; and beyond them the gay adventurers ; the many sized, the many coloured, the many covered ; plays and books of verse, and volumes of essays ; " Jurgen," Max Beerbohm, and Petronius ; anthologies, large and square and squat and oblong ; personal books whose shape and format have been the result of much thought ; for whose sake many specimen pages, many bindings have been

returned to their artificer; and on the extreme left, in the shadow of the screen, the cricket books, a shelf of reminiscence and exhortation; and below it a long row of battered *Wisden's*, and beside them the faded rust-red *Lillywhite's*. A small library, not more than a thousand books probably; but I would rather have a few friends than many acquaintances, and there is hardly a book there that has not some personal significance.

And yet on this particular evening I found the choice of a book by no means easy. I felt in no mood for a book that should deal exclusively with any one subject; and I searched unsuccessfully for the book that should pass casually, irresponsibly as conversation does, from one theme to another. I recalled the many evenings I have spent, tired after a day's work or an afternoon's football, talking, in a studio in Edwardes Square, of cricket and poetry, of life and literature and love; thinking how quickly the hours had passed as I lingered talking there. And there came back to me the memory of one particular evening when we had discussed the prospects of a new paper shortly to be presented to the world, in which we were jointly interested: Clifford Bax as editor, myself as publisher; I had been asked how happy I considered to be its prospects. But I disclaimed the rôle of prophet.

"One can't begin to guess," I said; "a magazine is like a novel: it's the expression of the editor's personal taste. If the editor starts to include work he doesn't like because he thinks it may succeed, he will fail as surely as the good novelist would fail if he tried to

write a pot-boiler. It would be insincere. Think of *Tit-Bits*. There was a paper produced by a man who stated a fact and asked himself a question. A paper, he said, is a thing that a man wants to read when he's tired at the end of the day. And the question he set himself was this: 'What should I myself like to read under similar circumstances?' He decided that *Tit-Bits* was the sort of thing that he would like to read; and as he was the average man to the extent that he was miraculously in tune with the taste of the average man, *Tit-Bits* was a big success. In the same way the success or failure of your paper will depend on the number of people who are sufficiently in harmony with your standard of taste to be prepared to increase their annual expenditure to the extent of one guinea. It is, it must always be, a pure gamble."

And I remember thinking that it was doubtless for this reason that the career of the literary periodical is so invariably short-lived. It is always the same thing. The paper is launched, fresh painted, with flags gaily fluttering. At the oars are to be seen renowned sailors: men who have ventured on noble hazards in the cause of letters. There is a shout of acclamation from the shore. "Never," they say, "has a ship been launched under happier auspices. See how it cuts the waves! See how the oars rise and fall together! Of a surety it will win through safely to the fortunate islands."

But before the ship is many miles from land, the watchers from the land observe signs of disquiet and dissension. The flags begin to droop. The sails are

slack. The oarsmen no longer work in harmony. Some of them have indeed ceased to row at all and others are making arrangements to put back to shore while the waters are still smooth. The bright speed of that first passage is forgotten. The ship sways in midsea at the mercy of tide and current. The faithful few are hard put to it to keep the boat afloat. They can make no headway, and the watchers from the land lose interest and give their ears to the tales of some newer seaman who brings tidings by another route of merchandise and treasure and perilous journeyings.

A sad story, but one whose details have grown so familiar as to cease almost to sadden us. We talk of the literary market. How, we ask, can a private enterprise hope to enter the lists against the vested interests of printer and publisher and bookseller. If the editor has a number of friends, he can produce two or three good numbers. But if his contributors are paid at all, they receive remuneration at a rate so low as to amount practically to insult. And however much the artificers of the new world, the evangelists of the dawn of brotherhood, may speak of the sacred trusts of art, a man is loath to sell for three guineas a commodity for which elsewhere he can obtain fifteen. The editor of such a paper receives from an " established author " only those compositions that cannot be satisfactorily sold in the open market. For two reasons may such compositions be unmarketable. Either they are bad, or they are unsuited for family consumption. Indeed, the student of literary history will find that most of the contributions to such periodicals of a lasting

æsthetic value are of a nature to justify their inclusion in "the index"; which is unfortunate commercially; for one does not particularly care to spend six shillings on a production that cannot be decently left about the house.

Unquestionably this is one of the main cross-currents that hinder the progress of the brave adventurers. But there are others, and I am not certain that the greatest of them is not the lack of harmony between the editor and the public. The magazine is a thing with which to pass the evening hours of half-past nine to eleven; and the man whose day has been spent among books, whose eyes are tired with the sight of print, would prefer, when his work is finished, to dance or play bridge or go to a theatre or a party. The dinner-jacket and white shirt into which we change after our evening bath is the symbol of a change of atmosphere. We have put away the traffic of the day's business; and those of us whose livelihood depends on letters find it difficult to establish contact with the civil servant and the bank manager who is content after dinner to settle down happily before a solid scholarly review.

The editor has put his paper to bed; he leans back exhausted in his chair. "Thank God, that's over," he says; "and thank God," he adds, "that I haven't got to read it."

That is the problem for an editor. If he prints what he would himself like to read at such a time, his choice will, as likely as not, fail to satisfy the man who has spent his day beside the telephone and whose ears are weary with listening to applications for an overdraft; while, if he prints what he feels his public would like to

read, if he substitutes a standard of decision other than "I like" or "I don't like it," his paper will cease to be an expression of his own personality, and will be insincere. The ideal editor shares the tastes of the public that he is addressing.

And it was, I think, on that same evening that Clifford Bax asked me how the paper that I should myself most eagerly welcome would be constituted; and I answered that the paper would have to take the place of a friend, and that I should wish for such a paper as would reproduce the essence of the evening that we had spent together.

"We have talked," I said, "much of cricket, of the great matches that we have seen and read of. We have wondered how we could persuade the M.C.C. to arrange a single-wicket match between Hearne and Woolley. We have fought old battles again, and have drawn weapons that have long lain rusty on the shelf. And we have spoken of our own achievements as may with complete propriety two such indifferent performers as ourselves. We need make no display of modesty. Our figures prove conclusively enough our quality. We do not apply to our cricket the standards that we apply to Hendren's. We deal kindlily with one another, as reviewers do with those friendly, worthless little volumes of verse that do no one any harm and may quite conceivably cause innocent entertainment to their authors and their friends. So in my paper there could be some such talk of cricket.

"And as we have spoken of the technique of writing, and of the literary market, on these subjects should I

commission articles. We have repeated a number of anecdotes, slightly scandalous ones for the most part, and the short story in my paper would not be sophisticated or obscure or modern : a piece of straightforward, concrete narrative that would aim less at vigour than at charm. I would have it a pretty, sentimental thing, with here and there a suggestion of wantonness, of riot. There would be personalities ; for the peeping Tom that is in all of us clamours for satisfaction. And we pass a great deal of our time discussing the peculiarities of our acquaintances.

" Each number should contain a character sketch of some public figure, and I should not object if it were malicious. It is a sign of vulgarity, I am told, to feel curious about the routine of other people's lives. A number of critics dealt very harshly with Mrs Watts-Dunton's little book on Swinburne. He was a poet, they said, a great poet. His work remains. That is all that matters. What purpose is served by this trivial gossip about boots and comforters and garters. Personally I found her book admirably entertaining. I felt, after reading it, that I knew Swinburne better than I had before. Routine is, after all, the framework of a man's life ; and it is interesting for a writer to learn how others work ; at what time they write ; how many words they write a day ; whether they work steadily throughout the year, or in short bursts of intense concentration. It may dispel the illusion to watch a play from the wings of a theatre instead of from the stalls. But there are some things about the showman that can be only learnt behind the scenes. At any rate, that is

the sort of stuff that I would like to read in my paper."

The fire had begun to burn merrily in the grate; the warm light fell caressingly in a glowing haze on books and chairs and pictures; and I turned towards it from the book-shelves that had become to me inhospitable, wondering why one's interests should be kept separate in literature if they are not so kept in life; why one book should be devoted exclusively to fiction, another to criticism, another to reminiscence, and another to sport. Would it not be for a change amusing to find unity of theme and subject abandoned for a unity of tone. And suddenly I knew in what words I should reply to Grant Richards in the morning.

"My dear Richards," I should write, "I am afraid that I have no news for you about my novel. But I shall be sending you quite soon, I think, a book that you will, I hope, like a very great deal better. It will not be fiction, though there will be short stories in it, nor a sporting book, though there will be there both football and cricket: there will be much talk of books, but it will not be literary criticism. Indeed, I do not know to what shelf the librarian at the *Times* Book Club will consign it."

It would be a sort of cousin to my dream paper; one feature only would be omitted. There would be no malicious personalities. There are some things that one may like to read, but does not care to write. For the sake of a few pennies and a few paragraphs, I would not run the risk of injuring a friendship.

And, lying back in the depths of my arm-chair, watch-

ing the dusky shadows of the firelight move over the ceiling as waves do on a calm day in mid-channel, I thought how pleasant would be the writing of such a book that would pass as conversation does from books to life, and from life to cricket, and so back to books again. How pleasant to let the pen follow the fancy of the anecdote, to let impression flow into impression, to snatch away the blinkers of the technique of formal narrative and criticism. Tired and well content and drowsy I let my thoughts wander out of my control on their lazy, haphazard journey.

II

ABOUT a year ago my American publishers asked me to send them some personal material for press publicity, and I spent a hot summer afternoon describing my parentage, my tastes, my aversions, and what use I made of days and hours. I am now receiving by every second mail syndicated cuttings of my confessions. I am learning quite a lot about myself. I am, I have discovered, a methodical and industrious person. Every Monday and Friday I go to a publisher's office in Henrietta Street where I read manuscripts, draft advertisements, and generally entertain myself and my employers. During the three middle days of the week I write.

I follow a regular routine on my writing days. I have breakfast at half-past eight. From nine to ten I walk over Hampstead Heath. From ten to one o'clock I write. In the afternoon I go to a cinema. From five to seven I write again. I work at the rate of 3500 words a day. During the week-end I enjoy myself. I dance, I play football or cricket as the time of year ordains. I see my friends. It is, in fact, a picture of the sort of young man who wins prizes at a Sunday school and makes good in the business novel.

I suppose that I must have in some such way spent

the week previous to my confession. Or perhaps I felt that I needed organising, that it was on such lines my time should be arranged, and that by the mere fact of writing down a time-table I should "Coué" myself into an observance of it; at any rate it is not, I need perhaps hardly say, very much like that. I do not confine my entertainment entirely to the week-ends. Usually three days a week in summer-time are spent lazily on a cricket field. Were I to maintain an average rate of ten thousand words a week, I should produce some half a million words a year, and heaven knows what I should do with them. Nor am I very often down to breakfast by half-past eight.

A mendacious chronicle that confession. But then are we not always drawing up schemes and time-tables. At the beginning of the year we estimate the extent of our income. We make two columns. We put down the items of general expenditure: rent, insurance, income-tax, club subscriptions, clothes, and washing. And we decide how much remains over for personal indulgence. "I may allow myself," we say, "three or four or five or six pounds a week in pocket money, and I will not," we continue, "spend one penny more than that." Nor do we for a week or so till we become so inflamed with a sense of merit that we adjudge our economy entitled to some worthy tribute, and we arrange a dinner party and twelve pounds go in a single night. It is the same with time-tables. They always get upset somewhere, and the people who stick to them are an infernal nuisance.

I recall a certain fellow-prisoner of war with a day

curiously and exhaustively pigeon-holed. "Come and make a fourth at bridge," you would say. "Sorry," he would answer; "but in five minutes I shall be starting on my second pipe." And when you wanted him to walk round the square his next drink was due. And when you wanted him to split a bottle, it was his time for exercise. Even his romantic nature marched in fetters. He was ordered by the irrefrangible mandate of his time-table to devote the hour between half-past three and tea to a "siesta of sensual reverie."

But that is the way with time-tables. There would seem to be no half-way house. You must either scrap them or become their slave.

Habits are different, though. It is nice to know that, at a certain time of the day, you can always find a certain person in a certain spot. E. S. P. Haynes, for instance. You know that any day of the week you have only to drop into the back room of a certain oyster shop at half-past two to find him, lunching off oysters and white Burgundy and port. And that as you enter he will wave a large, genial hand and start filling glasses for you.

There is something essentially companionable about the man with habits. A habit is a proof of contentment, of satisfaction. The man with habits accepts life as essentially a good thing. Otherwise he would have made experiments. He would have sampled new clubs, new restaurants, new houses. I admire the old gentlemen who lunch day after day in the same club and at the same table. It is good to hear a man say, "I have been to the same tailor now for thirty years,

and he has not made me a bad suit." We ourselves feel no inducement to carry our patronage to that particular house; but in these days of change and revolution, faithfulness, even to a tailor, is a commendable and righteous act. Laziness? Perhaps. But then, is not laziness a philosophy, the expression of a mellow, placid, harmonious nature. The war presented us with few more pathetic spectacles than that of the tired, harassed mortals turned out of commandeered hotels, adrift in a strange world, torn from the habits that had sheltered them for twenty or thirty years. They had grown old there, they had hoped to die there. They were trees planted firmly and happily in congenial soil. It was cruel to uproot them.

It is through our habits that we strive at harmony. They are the feelers that our timidity flings out towards an illusion of permanence in an impermanent and fleeting world. There is a rhythm in the recurrence, day by day, of simple tastes indulged, of prejudices flattered. It is only the superficial people who have no habits; the rudderless, inconsequent people and those fortunate few who carry in the stability of their own temperaments a balance, a sense of continuity; and because it is towards that state of poise that we are aiming in literature and life, because it is pattern, because it is rhythm that we are seeking in our lives and in our work, we draw up time-tables and describe ourselves in interviews as persons of routine and method.

One Saturday last November I made the discovery

on a football field at Tonbridge that the human head is a far more solid object than the human knee. For a fortnight I stayed indoors, my leg supported by a bank of cushions. In some such way, I told myself, in four or five, in six or seven years' time, I should make an end of Rugby football. Not many people play Rugby much after they are thirty. How many were left, I asked myself, of the odd forty-five or fifty who had turned up for those first post-war trials at the Old Deer Park. How many of those who had played in the 1919 A sides were still playing? Half a dozen? Barely that, perhaps. You do not notice them as they slip out. A side alters so little from one week to another, from one season to another. You always seem to be playing with the same people. But when you compare the team photograph of 1919 with the team photograph of 1923, then you realise. Where have they all gone, you ask yourself. Have they gone abroad, or have they married or taken up golf? Usually the end comes abruptly. There is no gradual retirement. Rugby is a game that you play every Saturday, or not at all. You cannot pick it up and drop it, and pick it up again as you can cricket and golf and tennis. You go on playing till a knee goes, or an ankle, or a shoulder, and your doctor tells you that rugger is a young man's game.

That is why, perhaps, we value it so highly: why we are ready to sacrifice for it so much that tempts us. We know that it is an excitement that will be soon taken from us. I am twenty-five. It is nine years since I spent a day in bed. But already I am beginning to

find football something of a strain. The stiffness that used to last rarely over Sunday is still with me on Tuesday night. And as I pondered this, I began to realise to what an extent football, during the last four years, has given pattern to my life. For four years I have been unable during the winter to accept any invitation to lunch on Saturday. I have never been able to go away for a week-end. Saturday evenings I have striven hard to keep free from parties; and I have done my best for Friday nights as well. I have never been able to go away anywhere between October and the end of March for more than six days on end.

But this, you will say, is folly, a supreme example of the perverse slavery of habits. So be it: but there is only one way of playing Rugby football, to play it regularly, to come on the field fresh, and not to worry during the last five minutes, when so many matches are lost and won, whether you will be able to catch the only train that will allow you to change in comfort for that dance. And you have to decide whether or not the thing is worth it. It is an affair of personal preference. Myself I know that for myself rugger has a thrill, a sensation for which the equivalent can be found in no other sport, nor in any other interest. On a cold October day, when ball and ground are greasy with a morning's rain, and the halves and backs have to go down to it if they would stop a rush, life is for the forward a very rich, a very splendid thing. It is a fine thing to feel a half-volley on the very drive of one's blade, to see cover dive for it and miss it. It is a fine thing to run fifteen yards backwards and

sideways in the deep, to feel that hot, tingling stab as the ball lands within one's palm, to know that sudden beat of the heart that says, "It's there, you've held it." It is a fine thing to see a man play forward and miss the pitch of it, to watch the ball pass between the bat and leg, to hear the rattle of stumps. Fine and noble things, with life at such moments marvellously rich. But it is a finer thing that dribbling on a wet day of a slippery, bouncing ball; a finer thing that hard-won sense of battle, as your shins crash against the half who falls in front of you. His fingers clutch at the ball. You kick blindly at them; you stagger; but the ball is free; it bounces into the open; you follow, panting, a singing in your ears. The back is rushing at the ball. Your feet are heavy with mud and a long day's shoving. Somehow you get to the ball before him. You kick just clear of him. The wing three is coming up behind you. He is fresher, he is faster than you are. Ten yards; will the ball bounce right for you? Your toe turns it ever so slightly to the left; the line is muddily white beneath you. You dive forward, flinging yourself upon the ball, your arms close over it. The three-quarter crashes over you, half-stunning you. You do not care. You hardly notice. You have scored a try.

You get at rugger something that you can get nowhere else. It is the game of youth, the supreme expression of youth, and it is taken from us, not unfittingly, perhaps, in early manhood.

To give up football is to change the pattern of your life. You will drop suddenly a whole series of habits. Someone will invite you down to Winchester for the

week-end ; there is an admirable train from Waterloo, they will tell you, on Friday night. Without thinking you will begin to excuse yourself. You are very sorry, but Saturdays . . . and then suddenly you remember—that is all over now. You can go when you like, and where you like. And you are appalled by the enormity of your liberation, and hastily begin to form other habits, to fling out fresh feelers, to take up golf, or to join dining clubs that meet on the second and fourth Wednesdays of the month; to be once again entangled in the pattern of recurring engagements; once again to be the lackey of custom, the creature of use and wont.

There is always cricket, though; and summer weaves of its four short months a surer, clearer pattern than the winter does. There is cricket every day, and there is the county championship. And if you follow closely the fortunes of any county, as I follow those of Middlesex, you have a firm framework for your personal peradventures. I find it difficult, even now, at this early date, to place with immediate accuracy the date of any given winter circumstance. "When did that happen?" I ask myself. I try and build round it a frame of associations. What else was happening at about that time? What book was I reading? What suit was I wearing? What friend had I just seen?

And gradually, detail by detail, I re-create the scene. But it takes time. And football only occasionally helps me. There are no championships in rugger. There are no figures, no individual scores, to help one. One game is so like another. Season after season

one plays against the same teams, on the same grounds, and with only slightly varying results. It is difficult sometimes even to place offhand any particular game in its right season. And anyhow, football is only a key to week-end associations. It is of small assistance in the dating of a meeting that took place in the middle of the week.

It is different, though, with cricket. People tell me sometimes that I have an uncanny memory for dates. "Did you ever," they will say, "see that film 'The Old Nest,' that was on at the Alhambra about two years ago?" "Yes," I will answer, "I went there the last Monday in August 1921—the 29th, I think it was." But it is not "The Old Nest" that I remember. I only remember it through its associations of Lord's and the second day of that wonderful Middlesex and Surrey match; the morning of inexplicable failure; Donald Knight's magnificent innings in the afternoon; tea-time with Surrey in an impregnable position. Two fifty runs ahead and eight wickets still to go. And then afterwards that startling, that glorious collapse. Nigel Haig taking wicket after wicket from the nursery end. Fender trying to play for keeps, and being taken by Murrell wide on the leg side off Hearne. The match a match again.

And I remember that evening riding on a bus down Oxford Street and reading the red placards of the newspapers that had been printed while Knight and Shepherd were in. I remember the shriek of the paper boys: "Surrey making sure. Paper! Surrey making sure!" And because it was the climax of an un-

forgettable day I remember afterwards dining with my mother at the Spanish Restaurant and taking her to "The Old Nest" at the Alhambra.

But that, you will say, is an exceptional occasion. There have only been three such matches since you went first to Lord's, in a sailor suit, in the May of 1904, and cried when Plum Warner's wicket fell. But in a lesser way of lesser things; I remember the books I have read, the friends I have met, the parties I have been to, by the matches that were then in progress. Should I, for example, be able to fix the date of the inaugural banquet at the Connaught Rooms of that ill-fated League of Youth, had I not read on the way there in the evening paper the score of the tie-match between Somerset and Sussex; and were I to hear two people wondering in what year and in what month Compton Mackenzie's *Rich Relatives* was published, there would be to guide me the picture of a sun-drenched day at Lord's with Greville Stevens asking me what I thought of the bright red volume that lay unopened on the seat before me. I have never kept a diary. I shall have no need to as long as *Wisden's Almanack* is published—during the summer, at any rate. There is always some association. You have met a person for the first time. You walk down Bedford Street towards the Strand. A newsboy rushes past you with the first issue of the late night special. You read in the stop-press column that Fender has taken eight wickets at Trent Bridge. The date and hour of that first meeting is in your memory for ever. And when you come to write your reminiscences,

you have only to turn for verification to the *Wisden* for 1921.

But I begin to detect in the reader an ominous stir of irritation. "Has this man," he is beginning to ask himself, "no sense of proportion? Does he think that a book or a picture or a romantic episode is of less importance than a game of cricket? Does he seriously discuss in the same breath an innings by Knight and a novel by Mackenzie? Cricket and football! what do they matter, anyway?"

Little enough, no doubt; but then in the face of eternity does anything matter so very greatly? What are we and our works, our triumphs, our ambitions, our disasters, but accidents in the long process of effect and cause. We talk of the eternal verities, but the flowering of art is as temporal as the enjoyment we draw from it. In sixty years we shall be no longer here to admire El Greco's painting. And in six hundred years its colours will have faded, the canvas will have lost its beauty. It will be valueless. And in the presence of eternity what is six years, or sixty, or six hundred?

Already we are ceasing to read the classics. The Latin and Greek quotation has passed from the leading article and the debate in Parliament. The past is being rapidly immersed in the ever-widening flood of modern literature. The past and present are always at war with one another. China has produced no poetry for two thousand years. "There is already," they say, "so immense a collection of excellent work that it would be a folly to attempt to add to it." In China

the past has stifled and killed the present. Here in the western world we are busy making an end of Greece and Rome. Will anyone be reading Virgil in the nineteen-eighties? And of Shakespeare as of Virgil.

We are always asking ourselves, "Who will be reading what in 1980?" We have always in our minds that unborn generation that we would influence and address. But either way, does it matter very much? These buildings of ours, these restaurants, and shops, and cinemas, that we are flinging up on all sides of us so recklessly, so haphazardly for purposes of convenience and display, they will speak of us far more distinctly to the men and women of the twenty-second century than these poems and plays and pictures, this music and these novels that we are producing in such profusion.

Contemporary political thought, and its resulting bills and measures and defences, will be as obsolete as is to-day the policy of Gladstone. Our points of issue in religion and morality will doubtless be the occasion for music-hall derision. But our buildings will be there; and as, to the majority of us to-day, the sense of Augustan repose and polish and formality is most easily suggested by the rectangular windows and low lines of London squares; and as the vulgarity, and the pretentiousness, solemnity, and solidity that were the worst characteristics of the Early Victorian age are forced continually on our attention by the elaborate porticos and columns, the theatricality of over-decoration that obscure for us so much that was at that time excellent and that make us exclaim

contemptuously, "How typically Victorian," so shall we too in our turn be judged.

As I am carried on the top deck of a bus down Oxford Street, and see at the end of that avenue of brightly decorated windows the majestic façade of Peter Robinson's emporium, and consider how it dwarfs the circus it surveys, and when I see from the top of Regent Street, far down beyond the jagged row of roofs and chimney stacks, the lovely low-roofed curve that the demands of utility are busy condemning as a piece of unserviceable decoration, I grow a little wistful, not so much because a beautiful thing is being taken from us, but out of a distrust as to what manner of buildings will take its place. I look nervously into the future. I see a young man, his coat and waistcoat flowered with the brocade of early twenty-second century fashion, passing here in whatever means of locomotion the young blood of that period elects to honour. I see his eye resting contemptuously on this jagged mosaic of ill-assortment. "They made that mess," he will say to his companion, "in the beginning of the twentieth century." I am afraid that of the Georgian poets and novelists he will be as ignorant as the majority of us are to-day of the obscure contemporaries of Wordsworth; that he will find a history of our political practices as tedious and as corrupt as those of the other periods with which he has had to acquaint himself for the satisfaction of his university examiners. He will be merely interested, casually, in his spare time in the form life took in 1923 for the average man and woman, and, as he will have inherited from us the amiable

quality of laziness, he will favour the short cut; he will be content to contemplate, to absorb the atmosphere of our public buildings, and I am more than a little afraid that, as he passes through Regent Street to Oxford Circus, he will shudder, as we do when we wake from a bad dream, with the shudder that becomes a smile, with the slow reassurance through familiar objects of an averted evil. And he will laugh and point to the façade of Peter Robinson's, "Typical Twentieth Century!"

But will it matter? Will it affect us how people live on this earth in 1990? We shall not be here to see them. They will be unable to distract and confuse and harass us with their intelligence or stupidity. It is only our egotism that makes us humbly prostrate ourselves before them. It is considered unworthy in a writer to address himself to the men and women of his own generation. But surely it is more sociable in us to wish to be of service and entertainment to our friends than to their grandchildren, who may develop, for all we know, into singularly unpleasant persons. Personally, I would much prefer my books to be read now by my contemporaries, by people I know and like, than by strangers when I am dead, with my books incidentally out of copyright.

George Moore has protested that each man finds heaven in his own way, claiming characteristically that he himself discovered it in the bedroom of that mistress who was so faithless and so constant. And I could produce, as a witness in his defence, a parson of my acquaintance who has discovered heaven in the

gallery at Lord's. A small, wizened, weather-beaten parson, in a long chesterfield coat that looks in the sunlight sadly green ; a guinea-pig, I suspect. For if he has a flock it can be rarely shepherded.

A familiar, an unmistakable figure; I do not know his name, though we have chatted together once or twice. He carries always with him a little black note-book in which he enters every score of over fifty that he has ever watched. When a wicket falls and a new batsman walks down the pavilion steps, he takes out his book, verifies the newcomer's identity with the aid of the scoring card and telegraph and proceeds to examine his record. "Ah, yes," he says to his companion, "Miles Howell ; a number of good innings he has played. Let me see—99 against Kent. I remember it ; the silly fellow ! Ran himself out : an impossible run. I don't think he will ever make a hundred for Surrey ; he gets so nervous in the nineties. Just the same at Lord's in that big innings of his. He could have got the record easily ; only another two runs. Then he flings away his wicket. After being missed, too, three balls earlier."

An old man he is, nearly eighty. During the war I used to wonder if I should ever see him again, whether he would be able to survive, at his age, four years of rationing and air raids and overwork. And no cricket. Very lonely, very much at a loose-end he must have been. Very many hours he must have spent studying that small black book of his, wondering whether the good days would ever return in his lifetime.

But he was there on the 16th of May, on the first

morning of the Notts *v.* Middlesex match at Lord's. And his little black book was in his hand. "Ah, yes," he was saying; "A. W. Carr—now the last time I saw him play was against Surrey on the Tuesday before the war. Thirty he made, if I remember. And out to a remarkably good catch, too, in the slips. They brought a telegram to him while he was batting, recalling him to the colours, I expect. A month later he was wounded."

I think that more than anything else, the sight of that old man in that Armistice summer, reassured me of the changelessness of the human heart, of its stability under altering conditions. And I think it was on that day I first appreciated the native wisdom of that old man.

Before the war I had always felt that he was sadly neglecting his duty to his congregation. He watched cricket all the week; he thought cricket all the week; what could he find to say to his flock on Sundays? But I learned on that first day of post-war cricket that as long as you see life steadily in terms of something, you can acquire a true sense of human values, and that county cricket is as serviceable a spade as literature if you would unearth the absolute.

Someone, I half think that it was Flint, had just missed Saville rather badly. The old man shook his head. "Poor, poor," he muttered, "and they were a bad fielding side in the eighties." Suddenly I saw the parson's life in relief. He had seen life in terms of county cricket. He had seen in the varying fortunes of the field as surely as has the historian in the rise and

the crash of empires, the arrogance and impermanence of success, the courage of despair, the vanity of ambition. He had seen men rise to fame and sink into mediocrity. Counties had had their hour. There had been the years of Surrey's domination, then of Yorkshire's, then of Kent's. Middlesex was now the rising power. There was all history in his recollection of "Nottingham's weak fielding in the eighties." And I felt that he would be able to give true wisdom to his flock on Sunday; he would not be easily misled by the shouting in the market-place; he would have a sense of values. He would have a norm with which to judge the traffic and confusion of modern life. We are children, he would say, with the child's right to choose such toys as please it; or rather, perhaps, we are in search of some trumpery half-crown clothes-peg on which to hang the sixty guinea fur-lined coat of our immortal natures. One must have a peg; but it is the coat, and not the peg, that matters.

And so back upon my traces. Habits are good things; a framework gives purpose to one's life, and cricket and football make as good a hat-rack for literature and romance and friendship as the routine of a civil servant or a bank clerk or an income-tax surveyor. There must be a background for bright colour, and that is mine.

III

EVERYONE has some sort of framework, some series of pigeon-holes that divides the year arbitrarily into its component parts. For Mayfair there is Ascot and Goodwood and the London Season. For the sportsman there is the 12th of August. For the cricketer summer begins on 1st May with the pitching of the first wicket, and ends when the last ball is bowled midway in September. He cannot say, as may the gardener: Summer began earlier this year than it did last. There may come the St Martin's summer of late October, the days of blue sky and mellow sunlight, when girls put on their light frocks again and when tea is taken in the garden, and butterflies wake from their winter sleep. But he will not care how blue the sky may be, nor how warm the air. Football has begun; the white screens are stacked out of the wind between the pavilion and the wall.

On the whole he is inclined to resent the unseasonable aspect of the weather. He considers it a waste of sunshine. He remembers the wet days of June when he tramped up and down the pavilion in his spiked boots, listening to the rain beat upon the corrugated-iron roof, watching the wicket turn slowly to a quagmire.

Winter sunshine rarely fails to rouse in him a feeling of homesickness. So nearly cricket weather, he thinks, and he remembers that May is still four months distant. Equally he distrusts the summer that begins almost before March is over. He would prefer to have April a month of rain and cold. We are only entitled, he thinks, every year to a certain number of fine days. We shall want all we can of them when cricket is again with us. Sunshine is wasted when it does not fall caressingly on white flannels and parasols and the sound of bat on ball.

He would prefer April to be cold and wet, although, probably owing to the peculiar formation of his time's hat-rack, he will be forced to take his holiday in the course of it, forced because it is the one month that provides a gap between the demands of cricket and of football. September does not. We play our last cricket match somewhere about the 13th, and on the next Saturday the District Railway is bearing us to the Old Deer Park and the rugger trials. There is no breathing space in September. But in April there is no cricket, and only a few desultory games of rugger; the grounds are too hard, the sun is too hot, and seven months at one game is quite enough. We dubbin our boots, put them on the shelf, begin oiling our bats, and spend a couple of Saturday afternoons in comfortable leisure.

I nearly always go away myself in April, not because I particularly want to, not because I need a rest,—is not cricket, the most complete of all rests, imminent? but because a holiday which involves a sudden dropping

of routine and interests and relationships is our one chance of recovering that sense of proportion which we tend to lose so rapidly in London. It is the equivalent of the Catholic retreat ; a pause ; the provision of an angle of detachment. If one has a varied and amusing life ; if one enjoys one's work ; if no place nor person has particularly got upon one's nerves, then a holiday is, from the mere point of enjoyment, an unnecessary extravagance. I rarely return home from one without thinking that I could have enjoyed myself more thoroughly and less expensively in London. I look on a holiday, a formal holiday that is to say, not an impromptu four days' stay in Brussels, or in Paris, somewhat as a duty.

In London we are always meeting the same people. Everyone knows everything about everybody, their literary and domestic arrangements and entanglements, their tastes, their ambitions, their peculiarities ; and it gives us an overweaning sense of our own impotence. It is healthy for us to be transported into a society where books are not read and writers not discussed, where we are all strangers to one another.

That is the chief charm of isolated country inns. One never knows whom one may meet, one is always encountering new types ; and it is often easier to talk intimately to an acquaintance than a friend.

Three years ago I went away for a fortnight to a small Sussex village, ten miles from any station. It is right underneath the Downs, and from my bedroom window I could see the shadows moving across them in the early morning. I have sometimes thought, as

I looked down on it from a balcony in Hammersmith, that I should never see any natural object more varying than the river. Its greys and greens and browns flow continually into one another, the lights and the water taking on different shades under the influence of the tides and currents. "I shall never see anything better than the river," I used to say, and I don't know that I have. Not better; but the Downs are as good. They are as full of colour as the river—brown, green, black, in certain aspects very nearly red. It is wonderful to see the sunshine moving over them; the long shadows changing their positions during the afternoon, revealing unexpected projections of the ground. It is the Downs, I suppose, that draw people to the place; no celebrity lives there, there is no artistic colony, no local industry; it has not been written up by the Sussex Cyder School. And yet there are enough visitors to support a really quite tolerable hotel.

It is not smart; I can hardly compliment our host upon his cellar, and there is not much choice of food; but the bedrooms are large, and two of the smoking-room windows can be opened. It is not too cheerful on a wet day, but I have been less comfortable in a smart hotel in Brussels at eighty francs a day.

And one does meet quaint people. Funny old couples discussing the income-tax; young folk on a honeymoon; retired politicians buried beneath the *Morning Post*. It was a real thrill, that first evening in the Downs Hotel. I had a long hot bath after my journey, changed leisurely, carefully brushed back what little a steel helmet has left me of my hair, and waited

for the dinner-gong. I went down at once, selected a table as far away from the door as possible, and watched the regular residents troop slowly down. And when, on my second evening, the waiter came up to ask whether I would mind another gentleman sitting at my table, I was able to assure him honestly that it would be a real pleasure to me.

Half an hour later, however, I had to confess that he might have found me a more interesting companion.

He was a heavy, thick-set man, square-jawed, clean-shaven, middle-aged ; the sort of fellow who acts the part of the strong business man in American films, who sits back in a chair with a cigar stuck into the side of his face, his hand on the receiver of his telephone, while a secretary in the corner watches the fluctuations of the tape machine. The sort of man, in fact, whom one meets too often in London to be able to welcome with any enthusiasm on a holiday.

And he would not talk.

I hazarded a few remarks about the trade slump, to which he listened with interest, agreeing that things were in a bad way. I discussed the situation in Russia, and he was of opinion that drastic measures were required. He agreed with everything I said, and one does not get very far in a conversation when one's companion never says much more than : " Yes, I think that's quite true. That's exactly what I feel myself."

He showed a little more excitement when I said that the fine weather would be to England's advantage in the International, but his opinions were those of the

daily Press. He thought we had been lucky to beat France, that Davies and Kershaw were the only men in the side up to the 1913 standard, and that Lowe was being starved as usual. Yes, he often went to Twickenham. Had I seen Pillman's last-minute try against Wales just before the war, and F. E. Chapman's first-minute try in 1910. He certainly knew something about football, but nothing that he might not have learned from the columns of the *Sportsman*, and besides, it was not to discuss football that I had come to Sussex. I began to regret my eagerness in accepting his company. He looked the sort of fellow who stuck to one, who would probably come up to me next day after breakfast with a "Well, and what about a walk this morning?"

I should be unable to refuse. He would insist on walking to the very top of the Downs. With what had I saddled myself? Directly after dinner I went straight up to my bedroom to avoid an increased intimacy over a cigarette and a liqueur.

Next morning I woke to see the line of the Downs hidden in mist and rain. "A day spent in the smoking-room," I said to myself, "and in so small a place I shall be unable to avoid my comrade of yesterday evening. Perhaps he plays chess." Fortified with this hope, I had my bath, shaved, dressed, and went down to the breakfast-room. My friend had been before me. There was a teapot and a dirty plate upon the table. I was glad of the respite.

But I found him in the smoking-room, sitting, as I had suspected, in the best armchair, with his feet

on either side of the fireplace. He was reading a book. I looked over his shoulder to see what it was, and read across the top of the left-hand page : *Einstein's Theory of Relativity.*

So that was it. A schoolmaster. Why had I not thought of it before ? A schoolmaster, who had long ago abandoned the habit of independent thought, who was interested in little except athletics, and was even there distrustful of himself, basing his opinions on standard authorities. " A mind," I said, " that has been dead many years, but that continues to acquire information. He has heard someone speak of Einstein in the common-room, and considers that a schoolmaster should know something about everything. So he buys a handbook at the railway station—a short cut to knowledge, that is his idea of education."

And that evening at dinner I decided to draw him on to his own ground. I spoke of the educational systems of France and Germany. I contrasted the Lycée with the Public School.

" We don't understand education in England," I said. " We send boys from one classroom to another, a bit of Latin here, a bit of French there, half an hour's mathematics, and a little science. We call it a general education. It's nothing of the sort. It's knowing a little about several things, but nothing thoroughly ; and it's better to know one thing thoroughly than fifty things in bits."

I paused, waiting to be contradicted.

" You may very well be right," he said. " But I'm

in no position to judge. I don't know anything about Public Schools."

"But surely—— "

"No; I never went to one, and, though I've met a good many Public School men in my run of life, I've had few opportunities of contrasting their standard of intelligence with that of the French and German. Your criticism would not apply to the men I know, because we are all more or less specialists in the army."

A soldier! And to be reading Einstein. I should have been hardly more astonished if I had discovered a parish priest reading Casanova.

"You are surprised?" he said.

"Well, a little; I hadn't thought of you as a soldier."

"So I would suppose; one wouldn't, but I am, though. A Major in the Inniskillings."

And, in order to cover my surprise, I began to ask him about the war; which had been his division; where had he been at Cambrai; had he been to Ypres?

But, after dinner in the smoking-room, I drew the conversation round to philosophy and science. I forgot how I managed it, probably through Plato. The theory of platonic love provides an easy bridge for a discussion of army life to cross over into the fields of speculation. And the Major proceeded to define with real enthusiasm the difference between the Socratic and the Aristotelian view of knowledge. His eyes glowed as he spoke. But there was no originality in anything he said. His conversation was a précis of the preface to the Socratic Dialogues in the Everyman Edition. On no subject was he capable of independent thought.

"You must have made a considerable study of philosophy," I said.

"Yes. It's the one thing I really care for. I have not done badly in the army, and, on the whole, I suppose that I have been happy there. But I have always thought that my mind's natural bent is towards speculation, rather than towards action. It has always been an effort to me to concentrate my attention on my army work. I should have preferred a life of quiet study."

A look of wistful resignation crossed his face, and I waited for him to continue. He was in the mood when confidence comes easily, and it is less difficult to reveal even the most intimate secrets of one's life to a stranger, a person whom one has never met before, and will, in all probability, never meet again, than to an acquaintance with whom one is brought in contact every day.

"Yes," he said, "I should have preferred a life of study. I never wanted to go into the army. It was a question of money. I was an only child. My father, a civil servant, died when I was three years old, and I was brought up by my mother. I never went to school. I had few friends. I used to sit and read for hours together; there was an idea of my going into the Church. But my mother died when I was fifteen years old, and I went to live with an uncle of mine—my father's eldest brother. He was not well off. I doubt very much whether, even if he had wanted to, it would have been possible for him to send me to the University. But he never entertained the project. He did not regard the Church as a suitable career for a man—at

any rate, not for his brother's son. For a month or so after my mother's death he was patient with me and sympathetic. But, when he thought the first grief had passed, he reassumed his usual business manner. One morning after breakfast he asked me to come into his study.

" ' Ah, come along, John,' he said. ' Now come, bring your chair up in front of the fire and let's have a chat about what's going to happen to you ! '

" I am sure that he did his best to understand me. He regarded me then, I know—for he has told me so since—as an absurd molly-coddle.

" ' You would not be the man you are now, John, if I hadn't sent you into the army.'

" He said that to me only a few months ago. And I daresay that he was right. I was not at all the type of boy that he admired. I must have been a great worry to him."

" And he gave you no choice ? " I said.

" Practically none, and I was too miserable at that time to care greatly what happened to me. I sat in the armchair and said ' Yes ' and ' Yes ' and ' Yes.' In twenty minutes the course of my whole life was settled. It is rather strange when you come to think of it. We live for seventy years. But everything that happens to us during those seventy years may be dependent on the course of a conversation that lasts twenty minutes, and takes place before we have lived a quarter of our lives, when we have no experience of the world at all.

" I had a bad time at the beginning. It was, as my

uncle called it, 'a licking into shape.' Sandhurst is no fun for a man who has never been to school. They gave me an ink-bath because I sat on the wrong side of the ante-room. I was no good at games, and I could see how the staff-sergeants and officers despised me. But at last I managed to fit into my box."

"I think you've done a bigger thing in winning through against so many odds," I said, "than anything you would have done sitting in your study. You've made a success out of a career that was uncongenial to you. That's a big thing."

He seemed pleased with me for saying that.

"Yes. I suppose I have made a success of it," he said, "and it hasn't been easy. It's been against the grain, and I have had temptations — one big temptation."

"Yes?"

"At least I suppose it was a big temptation, and I suppose I did right in resisting it; I don't know. I've never been able to decide. I should rather like——"

He paused, a little uncertainly, and looked at me hard from beneath his great, heavy eyebrows.

"I should be very interested, and, of course, I should regard anything you might tell me as a confidence," I said.

"I wasn't thinking of that," he said. "But, oh well, it does not matter very much either way, now. I might as well tell you."

And I sat back in my chair and prepared myself for the usual story—a clash between love and duty; that was what I expected. The wife of a brother officer; a

scene of passion and resignation; and then the long regret, deepening with the years. It is a story frequent enough, though everyone regards his own version of it as peculiar to himself. But the story of the major's temptation was quite different, or perhaps it would be truer to say that it was the same story seen from another side. It was a clash between honour and the thing that he valued most highly in the world. For he was the sort of man in whose life women play only a casual part. At any rate, this was his story as he told it me.

"It was out East," he said, "but I won't tell you where; and there was trouble, I won't tell you what. It never got into the papers, and it has nothing to do with the story. I was a fairly senior subaltern at that time, and with half a company I was guarding the mouth of a small river. Our chief job was to see that no boats passed up it unsearched. It was a fairly lazy job; not very much anxiety, and there was a jolly little town three miles down the river, where I used to go in the evenings for a drink and a smoke. It was here that I met one evening one of those Europeans who have lived so long in the East as to have lost their nationality. His face and hands were brown, and he had not shaved for at least thirty-six hours. He looked dirty, and was without self-respect.

"We talked for a little while about indifferent things, and all the time I felt him watching me closely with his crafty eyes. Then suddenly he made a masonic sign. I replied. And he gave a sigh of relief.

" ' I had hoped so,' he said, ' but I was not certain ; that makes everything so very much more simple. Now I can say what I like, and it will be a secret between us. You will not break your faith.'

" I nodded.

" He leant forward across the table, his face framed in his hands.

" ' You have seen a ship out to sea this morning ? '

" ' Yes,' I said.

" ' I am on that ship. I have some very important material that I wish to get through to this village, and I cannot because of your outposts.'

" ' But we let all merchandise pass through after we have searched it.'

" ' You will not allow passage to what I bring ? '

" ' Rifles ? '

" ' Opium. I have many thousand pounds' worth of opium upon that ship, and I cannot get it through to the interior.'

" He expected me to show surprise, but I have played poker a good deal in the mess, and have learnt not to let my face express emotion.

" ' Well,' I said, ' and what's it got to do with me ? '

" ' You can help me get it through.'

" ' Is that all you've got to say ? ' and I prepared to rise.

" ' No, no,' he said ; ' sit down. Don't be a fool. Hear me out.'

" I looked straight at him for a moment.

" ' I shan't do what you want me to.'

" ' If you will only listen.'

"'I don't know what's to prevent me walking across the room to that policeman, and having you arrested.'

"'Your oath.' And a smile glinted in his shifty eyes. 'You would never break your oath as a mason. I would not, and I should not call myself a man of honour. I know I am safe where a mason is concerned.' And, leaning across the table he touched my sleeve, tugging it a little. 'It will be so simple,' he said softly. 'There is only one sentry on the river. At five minutes to ten you go on your rounds. At ten o'clock the cook brings round a dixie full of cocoa. I could give you a little powder that you could drop in the sentry's cup. He would faint. For an hour he would know nothing. In that time a boat could be brought up the river and taken away again. The sentry would recover. He would shake himself, would stand at his post again, and would say nothing. It is quite safe.'

"'It's no good your talking,' I said; 'I shan't do it.'

"'But why not? If you do not let me through, someone else will, farther up the coast. It is a question of waiting, and I would prefer not to wait, but sooner or later I shall find my friend. One can do anything with two thousand pounds.'

"'Two thousand pounds!'

"'That is what I am offering. Big profits can be made in opium.'

"'But you won't be able to bribe a British officer.'

"He laughed at that.

" ' Every man has his price, and it was the Prime Minister of Great Britain who said it. Even British officers are glad of a little pocket money. Well ? '

" I said nothing. I picked up my hat and stick, and rose.

" ' All right,' he said, ' but don't be in such a hurry, and remember, if you don't, someone else will. Why should he have the money rather than you ? '

" I walked quickly out of the restaurant, but I had hardly gone a hundred yards when, putting my hand into my pocket for a box of matches, I felt my fingers touch a smooth leather purse. I took it out, opened it, and saw inside a small grey envelope. Inside the envelope was a reddish powder.

" I shall never forget what I endured during the next few hours. I brought forward all the arguments that I could summon—duty, patriotism, my name, but there remained always at the back of my mind this thought : ' Two thousand pounds means an income of a hundred pounds a year. I can resign my commission, and spend the rest of my life in quiet study.' I began to picture the long evenings before a fire, with a lamp shedding a mild light upon my book, and I contrasted it with the smoky atmosphere of the mess and the Colonel's interminable anecdotes. And there was no real reason why I should refuse this opportunity. Someone else would accept it. The opium was certain to be got through. This was the chance for which I had waited all my life : it would never come again."

" But you did refuse ? " I said.

" Yes. I did, and I do not know whether or not I did wisely. I went through agonies of mind, and when my orderly came at half-past nine to tell me that it was time for me to be starting on my rounds I knew that if I once got out there I should be unable to resist. So I took out a bottle of whisky, filled up my glass, spilt the powder into it, and before the red powder had had time to reach the bottom I had raised the glass to my mouth and emptied it.

" It was a good drug for the purpose for which it was required. I sat down in my chair. I did not feel ill, or sick, or dizzy. I just went off, and when I came round it was after half-past ten, and I was safe. I felt no ill effects."

" And that was the end of it ? " I said.

" As far as I was concerned. But I suppose that the story does not end there really. I met the same man a couple of months later in another café a few miles farther up the coast. He looked cleaner and smarter than when I had seen him before, and he greeted me effusively and stood me drinks. After a while he took me aside.

" ' You were a fool,' he said.

" I shrugged my shoulders.

" ' I'm glad I was, then.'

" ' You were a fool,' he repeated, ' and what has happened ? You fling away two thousand pounds—someone else picks them up.'

" ' So you got it through ? '

" ' Of course. What did I tell you ? The world is not full of Josephs.'

"And two weeks later one of the officers in my company applied for leave to go home to be married. We were all surprised, as he hadn't much money—only his pay—and had often been heard to lament the length of his engagement. When someone asked if his grandmother had died and left him a fortune, he blushed awkwardly, and said something about a bit of luck on horses.

"He never rejoined us after his marriage."

He stopped, and we looked at each other for a moment.

"And you wonder whether what you did was right, or not?"

"Yes; I've been wondering that for twelve years, and I shall go on wondering it to the end. If I had given the powder to the sentry instead of to myself I could have spent the end of my life as I should like to spend it. And I don't know that it would have been wrong. I am inclined to think that the end justifies the means, and, anyhow, the stuff was bound to be got through."

"But, after all," I said, "you've been happy in the army on the whole?"

"Oh yes," he said, "I've been happy enough, but it's not the sort of life for which I was intended. It's not easy to explain, but I feel that it could have so easily been so much more happy—if the rough edges had only been ever so slightly trimmed."

And for a long while he sat in silence. He was thinking no doubt of the quiet tragedy of a life lived

happily but not intensely. But I thought of the kindly Providence that takes the handling of our destinies out of our control, and had saved this curious old soldier from a career of speculation that could have ended only in pathetic failure.

IV

BUT it is not only nor indeed even chiefly through meeting new types of people that we can arrive at that angle of detachment. We need an entire change of setting. It would be hard to overrate the subconscious influence on us of our surroundings. A sudden sensation of taste and smell will recall to us a cycle of associated memoirs. The glimpse through a railway-carriage window of a gabled roof, a square church tower, a particular shade of sunlight on red brick will open the pages of a chapter whose existence we had almost forgotten; will reveal in relief, in perspective—with an objective reality that at the time it did not hold for us—a facet of the past. The obvious, the superficial reflection on such occurrences would be an expression of surprise that so trivial an affair as the taste of cocoa, the smell of wet stone, the glimpse of a square-towered church, should become a window opening on childhood. But probably nearer to the truth would be the assumption that these moments of sight and taste of which, at the time, we hardly more than recognised the existence, and to which we attached no value, were an essential part of the framework of our thoughts, and our hopes, and our actions, and that it was from them that what we have

come to regard in our lives as personal and important drew its nourishment, its colour, and its direction.

As the novels of Alphonse Daudet are steeped in the sunshine of the south and the simple, lazy kindliness that it engenders, so are Maupassant's stories children of the mud, the lights, the rain, the gallantries of Paris. And so over the poetry and novels of Thomas Hardy lies the deep shadow of the Wessex countryside. And among these many influences that tend, unknown to us, to make our lives gay or sombre, deep or shallow, or it would be more true perhaps to say that tend to accentuate in us those characteristics that are gay or sombre, deep or shallow, there are few that touch us more surely or more closely than that of the nature of the buildings, the streets, the shops, the churches among which we live.

It would be worth while, indeed, discussing whether the classical scholar of some old foundation derives the sense of antiquity, that knowledge that we are parts of a pattern, the threads of which pass out on either side of us, which forms so human, so tolerant a basis for his ideas and his actions, more from the study of Homer and Catullus than from the tranquillising presence on every side of him of old buildings, gothic arches and cloisters, and curious quadrangles. British administration, whatever may have been said against it, has been credited always with a genial tolerance, an admirable refusal to be perturbed by trifles, a policy of "let it pass." A capital social lubricant, this characteristic. And I wonder whether it would be too fanciful to attribute a part, at any rate, of this placidity

in the class from which the majority of officers and civil servants are drawn, to the mellowing influence of the school buildings among which are spent their most impressionable years. Some such effect there must be, I am very sure. A mind continually encountering the survivals of early generations acquires a detachment from the immediate present. A boy who, on his way from one classroom to another, from the dayroom to the cricket field, and the library to the chapel, has always before him the silent grey-brown witnesses of continuity and tradition, cannot help thinking often consciously, and unconsciously times without number: "all this was going on two hundred years ago and, without any very considerable alteration, it will be going on two hundred hence."

That sensation we rarely if ever get in London. I doubt if there is in the road I live in a single brick that is fifty-five years old. Twenty years ago Golders Green did not exist. I can barely picture this North End road as it was in the spring of 1907 when my father decided to build a house here, and to call it Underhill. A muddy, unpaved affair it was, with fields on either side of it as far as I remember: and it would remain so, we were told, for the Hampstead tube was in process of construction, and it would be impossible to build houses on the narrow gap between it and the road. Land's End for a while it seemed to us after our nine years in a dingy West Hampstead thoroughfare. There were no shops then at the Cross Roads. We had to walk across the heath to Hampstead. Indeed, only one train in every four or six came through to Golders Green.

Hampstead, Highgate, Golders Green ; that was the electric sign then on the Euston platform. There were no non-stops. And one had to decide whether it would be quicker and pleasanter to walk across the heath or to wait for a Golders Green train.

And then the Garden Suburb came, and the builders discovered that there was ample room for a row of houses between the railway and the road, and Smith and Boots and Sainsbury added each of them another branch to their activities. And 'buses ceased to stop at Child's Hill and tubes at Hampstead. And within four years the cross roads became as good a spot as Piccadilly for the unwary to be run over.

When I came home at the end of the first term at my prep. I could hardly recognise the North End Road. I believe that had I been transported there by a motor in the night I should not have known where I was, any more than I should have known where I was had I found myself in the spring of 1920 suddenly beside Potije Chateau on the road from Ypres to Zonnebeke. Golders Green sprang into life as speedily and as haphazardly as have the devastated areas. That immense hippodrome that confronts you as you turn to the left out of the station ; they had not begun work on it when I went back to Sherborne in the autumn of 1913 ; but the curtain rang up on Boxing-Day. In less than three months they built it ; working from start to finish against the clock. They had no time to instal a heating apparatus. On that first evening we shivered in greatcoats ; but within a week the fires were banked up. The heat dripped on to us from the ceiling. An

achievement, undoubtedly. Golders Green is a comfortable and commodious spot. There is the heath for exercise; the hippodrome for amusement; there are barbers and baths and cinemas, and trams and tubes and 'buses, and a taxi rank; an illuminated clock at the cross roads; two restaurants. A place, I am told, where one may dance, that even.

An impressive outpost, doubtless of Newer London: a fine tribute to progress, and mechanical invention. But there is one thing that, search how you may, you will never find at Golders Green. You will not find anywhere any indication that the world was inhabited a hundred years ago.

Nor will you find any such indication at Tottenham, or Balham, or at Upper Clapton; new streets; new shops; new houses; travel by what road you choose through any of the London suburbs: you will find everywhere the same cross-roads, with their policemen, and their electric cars; and the white sham stone-fronted cinema; and the local empire, and the long stretch of detached and semi-detached villas, with their garages and garden plots, very pleasant, very clean, very comfortable: cheap amusement and good amusement; such as grandparents knew not. But that sense of antiquity; those reminders in the gables at street corners of other men and other fortunes, that is lost to us. The old streets and the old buildings are being swept away. History in London can only be found in the places where one cannot afford to live, and the places where one would not want to live. We have no eternal landscape to speak to us of the passage

of human life. We have no equivalent for the Sussex Downs; the Downs that have hardly altered since the Romans camped on them. We have neither the modesty nor the pride of heritage. Family feeling dies where there are no family seat and no family possessions. We are parvenus, we townsfolk. It is only through a detaching of ourselves from our surroundings, through travel, or the company of books, most particularly, perhaps, through moments of intense self-realisation when we are in touch with eternal instincts or eternal forces, that we recover our sense of values, that we see ourselves simply as part of a pattern, a footfall in the sound of passage.

And it may have been that it was in search of some such amulet that Clifford Bax and I set out last April across the North Sea to Norway.

A long journey it was, with a good twenty-four hours of open sea, twenty-four hours in which to wonder what crazed splendour, what folly of irresponsible ambition, urged our Viking forefathers to desert their sheltered fjords in those flat-bottomed, high-prowed craft of theirs. A long unheroic journey on my part, at any rate. I lay supine and neither stirred nor ate, consoling myself as best I might with Geoffrey Moss's entertaining if scandalous *Sweet Pepper*.

It was worth it, though, that harassing, exacting journey, for the sake of the two hours of quiet passage in the late evening through the fjords. There is no country that welcomes its guests less ostentatiously than Norway does, that stands more simply on its own attainments. There is no parade of harbours

and high buildings and imposing statues. Just the long stretches of receding waterways, motionless, many coloured waterways, green and grey and purple; a purple that shimmers now and then to the rich transparent red of Homer's sea, Homer's wine-coloured midland sea; the fading waterways, and about them the long, endless, low-crested circling hills. Hardly a sign of life, only now and then below the promontories of rock, a warning light, and near it on the land some small wooden house.

But then Norway is an empty country. It is as large as England, and it has a population of three million. You will see no towns on the long fourteen-hour journey from Bergen to Christiania. Only here and there a collection of scattered hutments and the long stretches of the fjords. And it is remarkable that so small a nation should have made such a considerable contribution to the literature of Europe. A useless, hopeless task it must sometimes seem, we felt, to the young Norwegian. "I am writing," one can imagine him to say, "in a language that only three million people are able to understand. It is possible that my work may be some day read and appreciated in the foreign cities of Europe; but it will be read there in translation; and the phrasing, the colour, the rhythm, on which I have expended so much labour, will have gone out of it. If only I had been born in America!"

And then we remembered that the population of England when Shakespeare wrote was little greater than that of Norway is to-day; that it seemed worth while to him to write for three million people; that

these, as all other, things are relative; that it would be impossible without detachment, without a sense of the eternal values, to produce a masterpiece; and that such a one as Björnson would know out of the direct simplicity of his nature, that it is enough to plough one's furrow to the end.

We were bound for Finse and its winter sports, and it was exciting to look for the first signs of ice and snow at the edge of the water, to watch at each halt on the way the fall of the thermometer. We seemed to get little colder, though, for that is the charm of Norway. The sun shines out of a blue sky, and your face tingles with the glare that the snow flings up on it. It is a pity, though, that you have to wear darkened glasses to protect your eyes. It robs the sky of its colour, and if such a phrase may be permitted, it seems to bleach the snow, with the effect of an unreal twilight. Only now and again in glimpses, through windows for the most part, can one see the landscape as it really is.

But then it is not for the sake of its scenery that one goes to Finse; the long sheets of snow have, it is true, a certain remote, cold loveliness of their own; but the continued sight of snow is apt by itself to be depressing. Finse is not, shall we say, an ideal place for the ancient and infirm; it would be unexhilarating for them to sit all day long, looking out of the drawing-room window. Finse is very nearly the highest place on the Bergen-Christiania railway. It is well above the vegetation line. It consists of a station, an hotel, and some half-dozen hutments. It is quite simply an encampment

among the hills, and from the windows of the hotel one sees nothing but snow and mountains.

But one does not go to Finse to sit in drawing-rooms, not, that is to say, till nightfall, when one collapses among cushions, exhausted after a day on skies. Finse is the greatest place in the world for ski-ing; in its season, that is to say, in March and April and the first weeks of May. During the Swiss season it is a place of fog and mist and some three hours' precarious sunlight, but the snow is fine and hard there, when Mürren has become a bog.

We went there as novices, Clifford Bax and I. And it is a good place, Finse, for the novice. It is built beside a lake, frozen over for the great part of the year; and the banks that slope gently down to it provide a scale of ascending difficulty. For the first morning one stumbles helplessly within a hundred yards of the hotel on a slope with a gradient of something, I suppose, like one in fifty. By the afternoon one has come to master it. And as one returns tired to one's tea, one looks southwards beyond the lake and one says, "I think we'll try that slope to-morrow."

One cannot, or at least we could not, cease in six days to be a novice. But we managed to amuse ourselves thoroughly climbing up slopes and falling down them. Perhaps, had we been more proficient, we should have enjoyed it less. A thing ceases to be exciting when you are certain of success, and you avoid the slope that you have been down ten times in succession without disaster. How thrilling a bicycle was in those early days. How proud we were to free-

wheel down a hill, how we looked forward to the day when we should be able to mount and unmount without damage to our trousers. How we envied the blasé tradesboy who just seemed to pick up the handlebars and jump on the machine. And now that we can bicycle, the last thing that we would do would be to ride on one for pleasure.

But then that is hardly a fair parallel. Cycling is a form of athletics limited in scope by cross-roads and motor regulations and police. You cannot enlarge your craft. But ski-ing must be like cricket, and must be always new. As soon as you can do a thing one way, you learn to do it in another. We spend hours in the nets at school learning to drive a straight half volley over the bowler's head or past midoff along the grass. And then as soon as we have got it, we start trying to turn it to mid-wicket, so that I do not suppose we could drive the thing straight now even if we wanted, any more than Nevinson, an accurate draughtsman and a prizewinner at the Slade, could draw a horse that would resemble a photograph of one.

And at Finse there must be always new worlds to conquer. And always there must be that splendid compensating sense of exhilaration that comes from a complete physical fitness. It would be hard to imagine a more healthy life. There is no bar there ; and no late hours. You are in bed an hour before midnight. And you wake wonderfully fit to the most colossal breakfast that I have ever seen.

In the middle of the dining-room there is a large table on which is spread an incredibly diverse collection of

dishes. We counted them one morning: there were forty-eight; all manner of cold meats, all manner of cheese, all manner of *hors d'œuvres*. And there are shrimps, and prawns, and lobsters, and fish puddings; there are egg omelettes and ham omelettes, curious cold game, and fruit and jams and marmalade. Breakfast was a very great adventure. You were, in addition, served with a boiled egg and a beaker of cold milk. We never quite knew whether it was intended to be drunk as a cocktail or a liqueur or a table wine. We tried it in all three ways; and it was in each equally delightful. The Norwegian breakfast is the finest type of meal that I have, I think, ever eaten; and I was delighted to find certain personal peculiarities endorsed by Norwegian taste. I always, when I lunch at home, eat marmalade and cheese, preferably gruyère cheese, together. It is a protective taste developed gradually since the days when I was made to eat at my preparatory school milk-pudding every day for four years. It was doubtless a very admirable form of discipline. But I have not since eaten any pudding of any kind, and have instead developed what is, my brother tells me, a disgusting habit, but one which the Norwegian would apparently approve. At any rate, they place side by side on their middle table mountains of gruyère cheese and basins of marmalade. *Coldt bord* they called it, that centre table, and we thought of inscribing a ballad to it, in whose every line should be the name of some new dish.

A noble foundation, that breakfast, for a long day in the open; and when evening came one was glad to sit

and talk quietly; one's brain fresh and one's body tired. It is no part of my intention here—and I half hope that it never will be—to draw pictures of my friends. Enough to say that the evenings passed very happily in such casual intermittent talk as can only be exchanged between two friends who know each other so well as to have left scarcely a secret from one another.

It is an eight-hour journey from Finse to Christiania. But eight-hour journeys abroad seem of no more matter than a week-end run to Brighton. We are frightened in London of any place that we cannot find on a tube map. I have never once been to watch a county match at Leyton. "Heavens," I say, "but that's miles away. I could not think of going there." It never even occurred to me three years ago to watch the third day of the Middlesex and Yorkshire match at Bradford, although the championship was at stake there. And yet it would not have been, I expect, such a terribly fatiguing affair. I could have probably caught a train at about ten o'clock. I should have read a couple of novels for review, lunched on the way, and arrived at the ground shortly after two. I should have seen the finish of the match. By six o'clock I should have been in the train, reviewing one novel before dinner, the other after; and arriving at home certainly before midnight.

I remember being considerably surprised last summer when an officer on leave from India told me that he was going to spend a week in Blackpool to see the D'Oyly Carte Company in the Gilbert and Sullivan Operas. "Lord," I said, "what, all the way up there?" "It

doesn't seem very far," he answered, "when you've come all the way from Poona." Certainly we did not feel that we were undertaking a great enterprise when we left behind us the mountains and the snow of Finse.

It is a good city, Christiania, clean and fresh and compact, with broad streets, and an honest sprinkling of restaurants and cafés: a good city, shall we say, to spend four days in.

After four days one begins to weary of shop windows, and museums, and public buildings, and a drifting in and out of cafés. But for four days it was very pleasant to watch the stir of life in a foreign capital. Very different from ours, it would seem, the framework of their routine: their mealtimes, for example. You will find a notice outside the principal restaurants: Breakfast, 11–2; dinner, 2–6; supper, 8–11. Between the hours of six and eight, that is to say, you cannot get a solid meal, and the big meal of the day is taken at about half-past three. The restaurants were quite empty at two o'clock when we used to begin our lunch.

As far as we could gather Norway knows not our heavy half-past one lunch, over which so much profitable business is transacted. When the Norwegian sits down before a table with a menu and a wine list in front of him, his day's work is finished. If he feels any need for casual sustenance he goes into a café and has a snack.

Christiania has made a speciality of the snack. I suppose that any stranger abroad must wonder who do the work and when they do it. There are never anywhere any signs of industry. The Italian who is taken to the

Oval on a weekday would certainly wonder how ten thousand workmen could afford to watch cricket on a Monday. Indeed, I have yet to discover how they can. If they are in work they should be in factories and offices, and if out of work one would assume them to be penniless. There is no Oval in Christiania, but there are, as I said, an honest number of cafés ; and the *coldt bord* is spread in ample welcome. Not quite as amply perhaps as in Finse. But still amply enough to make an Englishman a little ashamed of the hospitality that the Bodega offers to its guests. Great trays of various *hors d'œuvres*, cold meats and cold poached eggs, and cheese sandwiches : sandwiches that are a vast improvement on our own ; with the cheese or meat arranged on one and not between two slices of bread, so that you can see what you are buying and cannot be deceived into the purchase of a ham sandwich entirely composed of fat.

Perhaps I am talking too much of the pleasures of the table, but food has a large share in the right ordering of a holiday. A sense of moral indignation is not a characteristic with which we should be inclined to associate the engaging and fantastic personality of Mr Norman Douglas. But he has known such moments ; and those of us who consider good food and good wine two of God's greatest gifts to man, remember gratefully his attitude to the traveller who confessed that he did not mind what he ate ; and in truth it was a disarming of revelation. " The man who is indifferent to women," George Moore makes one of his characters say, " is indifferent to all things," and so is the man who is

indifferent to food and wine. Such a one is incomplete. He lacks a sense. He is an abnormality. And myself I should be equally pained were someone to say to me, " Oh, let's go anywhere, I don't mind where I dine." I should feel as pained, and for that matter as shocked, as if someone who had asked me to lend him a book were to say, " Oh, any old novel, I don't care ! " Far preferable the lady who said to the assistant at Bumpus's, " I've got a green book and a red book, now I should like a blue book." She had at least a sense of setting, of *décor*. Her drawing-room would have been, I am sure, a very delicate symphony in blue and grey, and the light from the electric lamp would have fallen softly on an exquisite disarray of cushions. Certainly she would never have said, " Oh, let's go anywhere. I don't mind where I dine." She would know that evening is the artist of the day's traffic, who smooths, and composes and selects, and achieves a harmony out of disorder ; that it is for us to co-operate by the choice of the right book, the right companion, and the right setting.

That is why the choice of the right restaurant is so important. If we are in the mood for conversation there is our club or the Café Royal ; if we are alone and it would amuse us to watch other people dance, or should we wish to add as a flavouring to the music and the dancing the note ever so slightly struck of fugitive romances, there is the balcony of the Elysée Café. Perhaps we feel sentimental, and at a certain table in a certain restaurant, to the accompaniment of " Tango Dream " or of some other tune of yesteryear that we

have specially asked the orchestra to play, we recall a phase of life that is concluded, and quote with appropriate melancholy, Ah me, ah me, with what another heart . . . ! And there are again times when we ask simply for a quiet meal in our own company.

It may have been good fortune, or it may have been through trained instinct, that we discovered on our first day in Christiania the Theatre Café : the restaurant was on the first floor, and there was a band on the balcony above the café on the floor below ; so that the music rose softly and mysteriously through the floor, making it easy for us to weave stories round the various couples of the other tables.

That middle-aged man and the young girl at the table by the window, were they father and daughter ; or were we attending the first scene, the prelude, of some grey seduction ? That young couple two tables from us, they were not noticing what they ate. They hardly spoke a word to one another ; but their eyes kept meeting : and as they met, they smiled. She was not wearing an engagement ring and we wondered whether he would propose to her that afternoon, or whether he had already proposed to her as they had driven there that morning in a taxi. Were they sitting now shy and happy in the memory of their first kisses ? We wondered if they would make a success of life together. They were very young, we thought. Would she still be pretty in ten years' time ? Would that fragile charm of hers survive in womanhood ? And we decided that it depended largely on the life that awaited her, that hers was not a prettiness to sustain long hours of

toil and housework ; and we hoped in that atmosphere of unseen music that fortune would be kind to her, that her man would invest their money wisely and present her with a large house and many servants.

We went a couple of times, on the invitation of the management, to the National Theatre, once to a modern piece—a Galsworthy sort of play—the other time to a costume drama—*Madame Legros*, by Heinrich Mann. We were not, either of us, I think, able to follow the plots at all closely ; but as a compensation we were able to study more carefully those little mannerisms of dress and acting that are obscured by the quick action of the play ; that the Norwegian dandy, for example, does not hitch up his trousers on sitting down. And we were able to concentrate our attention, more than we should otherwise, on the stage effects, the lighting, the technique, the carpentry of the business.

But it was, I think, as a picture that the theatre there appealed chiefly to us. The theatre in a small town tends to become, as it can never hope to become in London, a social and intellectual centre. One seemed there to be in touch with the life of Christiania. And it was pleasant to stroll between the acts down the long promenade behind the stalls, to watch the various groups greet and mingle and separate ; to walk up the wide-columned staircase and turn into the large reception-rooms, with their gilt chairs and the inevitable bar for snacks ; the gruyère and ham sandwiches, and the Hansa Ol ; and it was pleasant to walk out into the cool air of the balcony and look out over the city as it lay below us in light and shadow.

In the immediate foreground the stern statues of Ibsen and Björnson; the trees, the gardens and the band-stand; beyond, the turreted house of parliament; and on either side running parallel the bright thoroughfares of the Carl Johansgate and the Storthingsgarten with their trams and restaurants and throng of people.

A pretty picture, but one that might at such an hour wake sadly in the heart of the young Norwegian a sense of life hasting from him. His whole life would seem to be enclosed by the bright boundaries of those streets, going no farther than the eye could see. A nation, he would say, of three million people, a capital of two streets and a few restaurants, and he would think regretfully of the scope and freedom of other countries and other cities—London, America, New York.

A story might be well began there on the balcony of the National Theatre in Christiania, with a young man confronted suddenly by the challenge of his life's tether; a young man dreaming of a world wider and more glamorous than his own, a world that would hold fit employment for his youth and courage and ambition. He would turn from the balcony with an ache about him, and it might be that in the wide reception-room behind it he would find himself suddenly beside the girl whose image had been never long absent from his thoughts, and there would be comfort for him in the sight of her cool skin and light flaxen hair and pale cornflower blue eyes, eyes that would smile softly into his, that would seem to bid him "take life easy as the grass grows on the weirs." And her sweetness

would be cast as a net about him, entangling alike his dreams and purpose and his discontent. They will say nothing: there will be no need of words; but they will turn and walk out of the large room and stand together alone and silent on the balcony, in the evening air, happy, unutterably happy in their nearness one beside the other.

And he will never leave the city: he will be unfaithful to his dream; he will build a chalet on the hills of Majorstuen. And his youth will pass; and one evening he will stand again alone upon the balcony, and remember how thirty years earlier he had stood there, dreaming of a wider city, and the old ache will rise in him and he will wonder if he has been wise to accept the immediate adventure, the adventure that lay to hand. He will ask himself whether he might not have found elsewhere employment for that faith and energy of which the years have robbed him.

Or it may be that he is faithful to his dream and faithless to his love; that he goes to America and prospers there, and all that other side of him, all that is not strong and hard and resolute, is crushed out in the fierce antagonism of finance, the ruthless fight for wealth, and he returns at length an old man to the country of his youth, to the city that stretches unaltered beneath him in light and shadow: the stern statues, the trees and garden, and the bright, thronged thoroughfare of the Carl Johansgate; and at the end of the balcony there stands a young man leaning, as he had leant thirty years earlier, against the stone of the balustrade, and he is filled swiftly, unaccountably,

with an envy for that young man's potentialities. "I was once," he thinks, "all that he is now. I, too, was young, and fresh and gracious. I, too, stood with the twenties and the thirties at my feet, and what have I made of them? While others played, I worked. And while I worked the magic and the beauty of life passed by me. I made gold of the years that others turned to poetry." And he feels lonely, and turns with a shiver to the warm lights at the back of him. And he starts, for it seems to him that there has risen suddenly at his side a figure out of the past: a pale slim girl with cool white skin and flaxen hair and pale cornflower blue eyes, and he is deserted by that assurance that has won him so many contracts, and he stammers and says, "But surely, somewhere,—forgive me, please; but, haven't we . . . ." And there is a low laugh, and at his side a voice, "But you should know her, she is my daughter."

And turning, he sees all that her mother has become, and seeing it, sees also his own youth buried there. And life seems to me an utterly empty and worthless thing.

A story that perhaps Maupassant would have cared to write. For that was one of his favourite devices to bring a man face to face suddenly with the survival of his discarded self, and the theme is Maupassant's; that we get always the thing we ask for, but never as we ask for it, never according to the letter of our desire.

V

VERY quickly, very pleasantly it passed, our week in Christiania, with driftings in and out of cafés, and visits to the chalet of an old friend of Clifford's, Von Erpecom Sem, on the heights of Holmenhollen, from which we could see far below the harbour and fjords of Christiania. We never saw it in the sunlight, in all its many-coloured beauty, but at night we saw it; a long scattered stretch of twinkling lights across the water; and agreed that it deserved all that the guide-books have ever said of it.

I am not certain, though, that the best of that holiday was not the waking in a sleeper at 7.30 on a Monday morning at King's Cross with the knowledge that in an hour's time I should be at home. I should find, I knew, something between fifty and sixty letters waiting for me, for I have made it a rule never to have correspondence forwarded to me when I go away. There would be certainly something exciting for me in the congregation of a fortnight's letters. It was the first week in May; the sun was shining out of a blue sky, with all the promise of summer's splendour. Lord's and cricket, and long, lazy afternoons reading in a deck-chair in the garden.

Once again the newspaper would become interesting.

I should find myself buying each successive issue of the *Evening News* to know if Hearne was still not out at Lord's. And once again at about three o'clock would steal over me that dissatisfaction with the manuscript that lay unfinished on my desk in front of me. My hand would steal out towards the receiver of the telephone. "Paddington 144. Yes: is that Lord's? Middlesex batting,—189 for 3. Thank you very much." And within half an hour I shall be sitting on the sun-baked gallery of the pavilion.

They pass so quickly those four golden months, that we are hardly conscious of their passage till the time comes for us to walk, at the close of the last match, wistfully across an emptying ground.

For eight months Lord's will be shut; we shall pass by it on the 'bus, and the white seats of the mound will be empty. A few groundsmen will be pottering about; someone will be rolling the practice pitch. We shall stand up on the 'bus as we go by, for one always does stand up on a 'bus as one passes Lord's; but no longer shall we crane our necks to read the figures on the telegraph, or peer eagerly to distinguish the players, to see whether it is Hearne or Hendren that is still not out. The season is not over yet, of course; there is still the Scarborough festival, and the champion county has to meet England at the Oval. But these games were, after all, an anti-climax; for the true cricketer the season is at an end when the last ball is bowled at Lord's.

At first we are not too sorry. Four months is a

long time at even the best of games, and it is pleasant to think that in a fortnight's time we shall be getting out our football jerseys and putting new bars upon our boots. It will be great fun going down to the Old Deer Park for the trial games and meeting our old friends. Soon the season will be really started, and every Tuesday morning will bring the yellow card : "You have been selected to play for 'A' XV *v.* Exiles, or Harlequins 'A,' or Old Alleynians." And then on Saturday we shall let the District Railway carry us out to strange places—Northfields and Boston Manor—places whose names are familiar to us on the tubes, but are distant in the imagination, like Chimborazo and Cotopaxi, places where we never expect anyone to live. For members of an 'A' XV life is always an adventure ; and then, when the game is over, and we sit back in the carriage lazy and tired, it is amusing to read through the soccer results in the evening paper and learn that at Stamford Bridge 40,000 people saw "Cock outwit the custodian and net the ball in the first three minutes." And afterwards we go on to Dehem's and meet our friends from the other games, and eat a great deal of roast beef, and drink a great deal of beer. Oh, yes, there are many compensations for the loss of summer ! The autumn passes quickly and pleasantly, but towards Christmas there will come, as there always must come, an evening when we shall sit over the fire and remember suddenly that it is four months since we have held a cricket bat, that May is still a long way off, and the procession of Saturdays seems endless. On such an evening we

take down *Wisden* and, long after our usual bedtime, pore over the old scores.

For *Wisden* is the cricketer's bible, though the unbaptized make mock of it. "What is it," they say, "but a record? We can understand your wanting to look at the scores of matches that you have seen, that will recall to you pleasant hours in pleasant company. But what possible enjoyment can you derive from the bare figures and accounts of games you have never watched, on grounds you have never been to? It is no doubt an admirable work of reference for the statistician, but as literature, as a thing that is read for pleasure! why, it reminds us of the half-pay major who spent his evenings reading the Army List of 1860!"

It is hard to explain. In the same way that the letters x and y possess a significance for the mathematician, so for the cricketer these bare figures are a symbol and a story. We can clothe the skeleton with flesh. We can picture the scene. We know what the score-board looked like when that seventh wicket fell; we can gauge the value of Strudwick's 5 not out. When we read, "Ducat, l.b.w. b. Woolley 12"; we can imagine the emotion of the man sitting at the end of the free seats below the telegraph. "If only Ducat can stay in," he had thought, "Surrey may win yet. There are several people who might stop at the other end while he gets the runs." But the umpire's finger rose, and we know the depression with which he wrote on the thumb-marked score-card "l.b.w. b. Woolley 12," and then pulled himself together, prepared to watch

" in a dream untroubled of hope " the inevitable end delayed for a few minutes by Smith and Rushby.

That for the games one has not seen. But for those that one has seen,—for them, *Wisden* indeed becomes almost an autobiography. Our cricket life, or rather the passive, the contemplative side of it, is written there ; and I am not sure that the receptive side is not the more important. We only write, I sometimes think, to bring ourselves closer to great writing ; so that through our own fumblings after self-expression we shall come to an understanding of the difficulties that great writers have had to face, and a consequent appreciation of their triumphs. Certainly had we not spent hours of scratching at a net, learning to get our left shoulder over to the line of ball, we should not feel so intensely the thrill of pleasure that Spooner's off-drive brings to us. It may well be that the hours of spent energy are an apprenticeship for the intellectual calm of an afternoon at Lord's.

Not always calm, though. Cricket, for all its leisure, is in its long-drawn expectation the most emotional of games. It has not, doubtless, any equivalent for the delirium of a try at Twickenham. But then cricket does not aim at that particular sensation. It is drama, not melodrama. Its atmosphere is heavily charged, one's nerves are geared high, one fidgets awkwardly in one's seat. The effect is one of continuously suspended action. One is always wondering. As often as not the tension passes. The climax is never reached. I have watched a good deal of cricket, but I have seen only four, five, at the most six, big finishes.

There was that Middlesex and Essex game in 1910. On the whole, I am inclined to think the most remarkable match I have ever seen. From the very start it was remarkable. I arrived at lunch-time to find Essex batting, with 93 runs on the board for the loss of two wickets. Half an hour later they were all out for 110. J. W. Hearne, an unknown bowler then, took seven wickets for no runs. And I shall not easily forget the excitement and the pride of that last afternoon, when Middlesex, with 242 to win, lost eight wickets for 142. The pitch was bad. Buchenham was bowling, as at that time Buchenham alone could bowl. Warner was still in; but there was only Mignon to come, a bad bat even among fast bowlers, and a newcomer to county cricket, who had made a duck in the first innings and batted quite indifferently against Surrey in the previous week. But in an hour Warner and S. H. Saville had won the match.

A memorable evening. We had resigned ourselves to defeat. "They can't do it," we had said; "it's no use worrying. Let's buy an evening paper and see how Somerset are doing against Kent." And we had smiled indulgently when the boundaries began to come. "Fireworks," we had said, and remarked that it was rather stupid to have a tea interval. "They might just as well," we said, "have finished the thing off first." But something warned us not to leave the ground.

And they came in forty minutes, the last seventy-three runs; a glorious forty minutes. Our indifference turning to a wondering hope: "Can they; is it

possible?" And then the recurring certainty they would. Forty such minutes as come rarely in a lifetime.

Then there was the Kent match in '21, when Middlesex, with the championship to win, made over three hundred runs in four hours, to win the match; then the great battle four days later against Surrey. And as I correct these proofs I feel that, in spite of the printer's bill, it would be ungenerous in me to pay no tribute to the second day of this year's Sussex game at Lord's. It began dingily enough, with a dull sky and a cold wind, and H. L. Dales taking ninety minutes to make sixteen. But fortunately I spent that first hour or so in the warm comfort of a tube. And after lunch the sun came out; the cricket became exciting, and the afternoon grew into one of the happiest that I have ever spent at Lord's. The excitement, curiously enough, was focussed on a battle for a first innings lead. Usually one does not enthuse about points on the first innings. But one is out to enjoy oneself on a Whit Monday. There is in the presence of a big crowd the contagion of a herd emotion. And certainly the cricket was very good. Sussex is the best fielding side in England; I am not certain that J. W. Hearne is not to-day the finest batsman in the world. And the afternoon was a long struggle between Hearne and Sussex.

I have not the exact figures by me, but Middlesex wanted some 311 runs for their two points, and seven wickets were down with the follow-on still unsaved, when Twining came in to partner Hearne. On some

of his partners Hearne must, I think, exert a magnetic influence. Certainly Twining, when he is in with him, looks and is a fifty per cent. better player than when Lee or Hendren is at the other end. He has never done anything comparable with the great partnership with Hearne that won Middlesex the championship in 1921. Indeed, I rather think that his fifty-seven not out that Whit Monday afternoon is his second highest score in a county match. A useful rather than a good innings, perhaps, but he stayed there; and I doubt if I ever saw a finer innings than Hearne's 140.

Some people find Hearne dull, as some people find Tolstoy dull. He has not the volcanic, the eruptive vigour of Hendren and Dostoieffsky. He is moving with a complete economy of effort towards a very distant point. Where other batsmen think in fifties, he thinks in double centuries. He knows exactly what he is doing all the time. Batsmen like Holmes and Mead and Ducat get there somehow in the end; but they have not all the time the end in view, or rather, perhaps, the spectator as he watches them, has not the end in view. Holmes, whether he makes a cypher or a century, never looks anything but an ordinary player. Hearne is a great batsman the moment he walks on to the field. No one who knows anything about cricket could see him play one stroke and have any doubts as to his quality.

But it was after Hearne was out leg-before to Gilligan and Murrell had failed, that the excitement really started. Twelve runs were wanted, I think, when Durston came in to bat. They got them somehow, amazingly, but

they got them. There was a shriek of hysterical excitement every time the ball hit the middle of the bat and trickled safely to mid on. There were byes, and there was an overthrow, and miraculously Durston turned Gilligan to leg and along the ground. It is the only good stroke that I have ever seen him make. Sometimes I think I am uncharitable to Durston. "He is not so awfully bad," I tell myself, "not worse, really, than Mignon was, or Rushby. It is only that there is so much of him to look incompetent." And then I see him bat again and I say, "No, really he is absolutely the worst, without exception the worst. There can be no man living whom the captain could, save as a practical joke, put in No. 11 for a side of which Durston was a member." But on Whit Monday, when he made that stroke for two off Gilligan, he was cheered as has rarely any stroke by Hobbs been cheered, and the large, jolly, holiday crowd poured homewards the happier for his batting.

Every summer has its own landmarks, its own sensations, its own big matches; even this cold and miserable spring of numb fingers and dropped catches. There is no season so poor that we cannot look back to it for some things gratefully. And the future will be as good; better, perhaps. And yet——. I wonder whether ever again there will be a day at Lord's to equal that of the 31st of August three years ago.

No cricketer will need me to remind him of what happened then, or to retell the story of "Plum" Warner's last and greatest match. Enough to say that it was the most dramatic, the most fitting thing

that has happened in any sport in any country. If no championship even had been at stake it would have been a great, a memorable match. With the championship dependent on the result it was a titanic battle. But with the added sentiment of Warner's last appearance—such things come only once in a generation.

I was not there on the first day. I was playing cricket at Hayward's Heath, and I remember the excitement with which I tore open the first issue of the *Evening Argus* to see which side had won the toss. Middlesex batting. I gave a sigh of relief. That will be all right, I thought. A plumb wicket. The Surrey bowling is weak. They took all day yesterday to get out Northampton. There will be three hundred on the board by six o'clock; and then came edition after edition with the news that things were not going well at Lord's. Lee out, Hearne out. Hendren only 41; 109 for 5; 149 for 6. And then tardily in the last issue news of a stand starting between Warner and Greville Stevens.

But even so, it was not good enough. To bat all day and only make 250. And all through the Monday I watched hour by hour the match and championship slip away. Catches were put down; the bowling had no sting. And in the intervals one read on the tape machine of the manner of mess that Lancashire were making of Worcester in the north. I left the ground when Fender declared his innings closed. Seventy-three runs behind. Only a day left for play. We could make a draw of it probably if we wanted to. But only

with a win could we win the championship. It was no use. It was over. Better not see the end.

And yet I went down there on the Tuesday. There was still a chance; should we win, I should never forgive myself had I not been there to cheer the team. And hope came back to me when I met "Skipper" Pawling on the steps of the pavilion. "It's all right, my boy," he said; "it's all right. We'll just manage it." Mrs Warner had come down with white heather for the professionals. And I can still hear the eager, high-pitched tension of her voice, "We shall do it, shan't we, Mr Pawling." I am not certain that Sydney Pawling is not the most vivid memory to me of that long August day. I can see him drawing his great hand across his mouth; I can see him muttering when Hearne came in to bat, "He's looking ill; fine drawn. I must send him over some champagne; some champagne." And I can remember him almost in tears at the end of the day as the Surrey wickets fell.

But then we were all of us, I think, very near to tears at the end of that great evening. When I went to Lord's for the first time in a sailor suit in the spring of 1904, I cried when Warner's wicket fell, and I rather think I cried at the end of it all at twenty past six on the thirty-first of August, when the huge crowd swept over the playing field and carried him shoulder high to the pavilion.

Will Lord's ever see such a scene again? Will Lord's ever again know anything to equal the excitement of that last hour, from the moment when Hendren caught Shepherd high over his left shoulder

as he backed against the screen? It was the turning-point, that catch. In half the time Surrey had got half the runs, and only two wickets had gone down. Then came that catch which only Hendren could have held off a stroke that from the other end would have been a six. It was a match again. Fender came in next; there was an awful hush. Half an hour of Fender and the match was Surrey's. But he hit right across a straight length ball from Durston. 112–4–1. Still there was Peach to come, and Reay, and Hitch and Ducat, with Sandham batting beautifully at the other end. The odds were still on Surrey. But Hearne and Stevens did not fail their captain in that last hour. Hendren, of all people, missed Hitch low down at mid-wicket, but the bowlers could afford to do without their fielders. Wicket after wicket fell. 176 for 9, and Rushby came in, swinging his arms, while the crowd laughed. Rushby, a clown batsman; nothing more. But he stood there, and singles began to come; and one looked at the clock and reminded oneself that Rushby had once stayed in while Crawford put on 80. Twelve runs in ten minutes; would the end never come? Then an unplayable ball from Stevens. It was all over. The ball trickled to short leg. Hearne and Hendren rushed from the slips after it. Hearne got there first, ran with his "souvenir" to the pavilion. And the great crowd swarmed about the wicket.

I do not expect ever to see again anything to equal it. But I am proud and glad to have been there, to have taken part in that tribute to the greatest hearted cricketer the world has ever known.

VI

HOW many hours during the year, I wonder, must we spend over our *Wisden?* A great many surely, so many, indeed, that we cannot help thinking how small is the literature of cricket. Only two shelves out of thirty. There are one or two novels, *Willow the King*, A. A. Milne's *The Day's Play*, a few of Mr Lucas's Essays, the complete works of P. F. Warner, W. J. Ford's *Middlesex Cricket*, Lord Harris's *Lord's and the M.C.C.*, a few volumes of reminiscence, one or two textbooks, P. G. Wodehouse's delightful *Mike*, *The Hambleden Men*, and Neville Cardus.

Poor stuff, too, for the most part. The literature of cricket can be divided into two categories. There are the books by men who understand cricket but do not know how to write, and the books by the men who know how to write but do not understand cricket. In the course of a year many books and stories dealing with the game are published, but only rarely in a generation comes combined the sportsman and the man of letters. Whom have we to-day: P. G. Wodehouse; but he prefers to write of golf. A. A. Milne; but he is dabbling in grease paint. E. V. Lucas; but so rarely nowadays. Neville Cardus; yes, the only one, the only genuine one, perhaps. The first man to make literature

out of cricket. His essay on Tom Richardson; his description of Maclaren leaving the field for the last time at Eastbourne; his "Greatest Test Match." They were written for the columns of a daily paper, but there is literature in them, real prose, real melody, real emotion. He is alone, though, Neville Cardus.

Hardly any poetry has been written about the game. There is Thompson's "Oh, my Hornby and my Barlow Long Ago," and there is a quantity of verse, pleasant jingly stuff of the drinking-song variety, the best of it valedictory, such as Andrew Lang's "Beneath the Daisies Now They Lie." But the few attempts that have been made at serious poetry have not been fortunate. Edward Cracroft Lefroy, for example, to whom cricket appealed chiefly as an æsthetic spectacle, included in his catalogue of the physical attributes of a bowler the

> Elbows apt to make the leather spin
> Up the slow bat and round the unwary shin,

which is not only poor verse but proves on the part of the author an inadequate knowledge of the no-ball rule.

But perhaps verse is not a happy medium through which to express an enjoyment of cricket. Phrases like "unwary shin" will intrude themselves, and, although Pindar used to celebrate with equally appropriate ardour the feats of generals and of athletes, the very idea of commemorating in heroic couplets Woolley's two great test-match innings at Lord's seems ridiculous. We have grown so accustomed to reading accounts of cricket matches in the prose style of the sporting press that any other treatment is impossible. Perhaps

Mr Masefield will one day attempt an epic of the fifth test match at the Oval, but I doubt if it would be a success. It would be a quaint performance, as though one were to walk down the Strand in court dress of Jacobean cut. The jargon of a cricket report is unsuited to heroic verse, but it is indispensable. If, for instance, we were informed that Hendren,

> Snared into over-confidence, stept back,
> Swinging his bat as though he would eclipse
> The thundered violence of Albert Trott.
> Yet had he not correctly judged the flight
> Of the quick spinning ball.
> Aghast he heard
> Behind his back the rattle of the stumps,

we should not be very much the wiser. We should prefer to learn of such a tragedy in straightforward narrative : " Hendren hooked Mailey to the on-boundary twice in succession ; but, in an attempt to repeat the stroke to a ball that was pitched farther up to him and that went away with the arm, he was clean bowled."

Indeed, A. E. Housman's "On an Athlete Dying Young" is the best serious poem that can be said to interpret any side of cricket, and that poem is written to a runner. But it is universal, for it contains the tragedy of all professional sport :

> Now you will not swell the rout
> Of lads that wore their honours out,
> Runners whom renown outran,
> And the name died before the man.

Contemporary reference to any cricketer no longer playing is made in the past tense, " Tarrant was . . . " ;

and how many of the enthusiastic Ovalites who recall so eagerly the great days of "Locky and Brocky" pause to consider that their hero is still alive?

The lack of prose literature dealing with cricket is, however, as surprising as it is deplorable. For a hundred years ago the game must have been able to supply an intriguing background for a novel. Lord's was like Paddington recreation-ground, and, when there was no match, the public were allowed to hire a pitch there for a shilling, a sum that included the use of stumps, bat, and ball; there were no mowing machines then, and the grass was kept down by a flock of sheep, which was penned up on match days. On Saturdays, four or five hundred sheep were driven on to the ground on their way to the Smithfield Market. And then half a dozen small boys would run out and pick out any long grass or thick tufts that were still left. It is not surprising that there were shooters then. And never since the days of the gladiators can there have been such wholesale bribery and corruption as there was in the days of Lord Frederic Beauclerk.

Enormous bets were made. Matches were played for stakes of one thousand guineas a side—in those days no small sum, and professionals found it hard to live on their pay; indeed, they made little effort to; and in big matches where a lot of money was at stake it was not uncommon to find one side trying to get themselves out while their opponents were trying to give them easy balls to make runs off. Indeed Lord Harris tells a story of how two professionals had a dispute at one of the annual general meetings at Lord's, and

in the presence of the noble lords of the M.C.C. such questions as "Who sold the match at Nottingham?" and "Who would bowl at anything but the wicket for Kent?" were bandied about to the consternation, Lord Harris says, "of some of those present who had lost their money contrary to all calculation on the matches referred to"! There were few newspaper reporters then, and things could be done at Old Trafford news of which would come tardily to Lord's.

The only persons who appear to have remained incorruptible during these early days are, strangely enough, the umpires. Perhaps they put too high a premium on their honesty, and the bookmakers found it cheaper to have dealings with the players, or perhaps there was a general conspiracy of silence, no one being sufficiently without blame to cast a stone. At any rate, the interpreters of the law seem to have given satisfaction, and they can have had no easy time. For it was during these years that the code of rules under which we play to-day was compiled. And it was compiled in a most haphazard fashion. No committee sat over a table and weighed every possible contingency and interpretation of the laws. The authorities were worthy fellows, but lazy and unimaginative. They drew up a rough code and waited for things to happen. If any particular practice began to cause a nuisance they were prepared to put a stop to it. In the meantime let the wheel turn.

It did turn, and often with uncomfortable complications. At one time, for instance, in the days when there were only two stumps, a hole was cut between and

beneath the wickets, and when a batsman completed a run he had to pop his bat into this hole. If the bowler succeeded in popping the ball there before the bat the batsman was run out. It was found, however, that bat and ball would often arrive in the hole simultaneously, with sad results to the bowler's fingers; and often enough, when a fieldsman had anticipated the bat, the defeated player would take what revenge he could by driving his bat upon the knuckles of his conqueror. After a certain number of fingers had been broken the authorities thought fit to substitute for the hole the present popping crease.

Much the same thing happened in the case of leg-before-wicket. As pads were not then invented, and as the ball was delivered with much rapidity, it had never seemed likely that any batsman would, with deliberate intention, place his unprotected legs in the path of a hard ball. But one day the cricket world was thrown into consternation by the tactics of one Ring, who placed his body in front of the wicket in such a way that it was impossible for him to be bowled out. His shins became very sore, but his score became very large. This gallant act of self-sacrifice for the good of his side did not win the admiration it deserved; it was described by a contemporary writer as "a shabby way of taking advantage of a bowler," so that when Tom Taylor adopted the same tactics the bowlers "declared themselves beaten": a leg-before-wicket rule was drawn up, and another opportunity for Spartan courage was lost to an effeminate age.

The rules were altered to suit each fresh development. And when we remember the manifold and barbarous practices of that day, we cannot but shudder when we try to imagine what fearsome and horrible atrocities must have taken place before the rule about " obstruction of the field " was invented. Cannot we picture some burly butcher skying the ball to point and then, in order to save his wicket, rushing at the fieldsman and prostrating him with his bat ? Cannot we see the batsman at the other end effecting a half-nelson upon the bowler who was about to catch his partner ? The laws of Rome were not built up without bloodshed, nor were the laws of cricket. What opportunities for humorous narrative have been lost !

If only there had been some naturalistic writer who would have collected laboriously all these stories and made a novel of them. If Zola had been an Englishman we could have forgiven him his endless descriptions of gold-beaters and agricultural labourers, if one of the Macquarts had been a professional cricketer and one of those interminable novels had reconstructed the cricket world of his day. If only the caprice of things had allowed George Moore to spend his early years near a cricket field instead of a racing stable.

But even those few novelists who have included cricket in their panorama of the period appear woefully ignorant of the management of the game. What a sad mess Dickens made of it, and how well he might have done it ! How entertaining Mr Winkle might have been behind the wicket : what sublime decisions he would have given as an umpire ! But,

no: Muggleton play Dingley Dell, and the great Podder "blocked the doubtful balls, missed the bad ones, took the good ones and sent them flying to all parts of the field," which is surely the most quaint procedure that any batsman has ever followed; and as a climax Dingley Dell give in and allow the superior prowess of all Muggleton, apparently before they have had their own innings—an action without precedent in the annals of the game.

And so it has happened that our one complete picture of the Homeric days has come to us not from the novelists, the official recorders of the hour, but from John Nyren, who wrote without any thought of posterity a guide-book for the young cricketer. There are some books that, like wine, acquire qualities with the passage of time, and for us to-day the *Cricketer's Tutor* possesses a value that it did not have for those in whose service it was written. To the young blood of 1840 it was merely a manual, a sort of field service regulations; to-day it is a piece of literature; it interprets a period; it reveals a personality.

As we read John Nyren's advice we can see how the game was played in 1820 on rough pitches, without pads, in top hats, and with a courage the extent of which may be gauged from the instructions that he gives to long-stop:

> When the ball does not come to his hand with a fair bound, he must go down upon his right knee with his hands before him: then in case these should miss it, his body will form a bulwark and arrest its further progress.

In those days we learn that spectators were patient folk who sat on backless seats, drank porter, smoked long pipes, and made bets about the match. There was leisure then, and John Nyren believed that the batsman should wait to make his runs till bowler and fieldsmen were exhausted :

> I would strongly recommend the young batsman to turn his attention to stopping : for by acting this part well, he becomes a serious antagonist to the bowler ; who, when he sees a man coming in that he knows will stop all his length balls with ease, is always in a degree disheartened. He has no affection for such a customer. Besides, in this accomplishment lies the distinction between the scientific and the random batsman.

The random batsman : it is an adjective we find often in the *Cricketer's Tutor*. For Nyren had an intense hatred of unskilled success. Cricket was to him an art the technique of which could only be mastered after an elaborate apprenticeship. He distrusted the short cut, and we find him the most bitter opponent of the young idea. He is the eternal Tory of yesterday, of to-day and of to-morrow. And he is very human to us as he stands on the brink of change uttering his solemn warning. For it was towards the end of his career that round-arm bowling was introduced, and it is hard to realise the revolution this caused in the world of sport. It made as much stir and roused as many bad feelings in its own province as its contemporary

the Reform Bill. This bowling was described as the "new march of intellect—style," and in 1827 three matches were played between Sussex and England to test the merits of the two methods. The county won the first two matches, and the nine professionals on the England side were so incensed that they signed a formal petition "that we, the undersigned, do agree that we will not play the third match between all England and Sussex unless the Sussex bowlers bowl fair—that is, abstain from throwing." And the great Mr Ward, when asked his opinion, said, "I can only say cricketers are a peaceable class of men. With this bowling I never see a match that might not end in a wrangle."

John Nyren was its most fierce opponent, and it is rather pathetic to read his violent and ineffectual protest. This invention would ruin cricket. He saw a new game that would lack the grace and skill of the game as he and his friends had played it. The ball would come so fast that the batsman would not have time to prepare for it.

> The indifferent batsman possesses as fair a chance of success as the most refined player. And the reason for this is obvious, because from the random manner of delivering the ball it is impossible for the fine batsman to have time for that finesse and delicate management which so peculiarly distinguished the elegant manœuvring of the chief players who occupied the field about eight, ten, or more years ago.

And he goes on to state his belief that if the present

system be persisted in a few years longer " the elegant and scientific game of cricket will develop into a mere exhibition of rough, coarse horse-play."

What would he say if he could return to the pavilion at the Oval, and see Hitch bowling at how many miles is it an hour, and Hendren hooking him to the square-leg boundary ? And the last paragraph of his protest is that of every man since the beginning of time who has seen his day pass, his heroes overthrown, and a rash, irreverent generation in their place.

> I can use my eyes [he writes], I can compare notes and points in the two styles of playing, and they who have known me will bear testimony that I have never been accustomed to express myself rashly.

A forlorn figure, trusting so simply in the permanence of a static world.

It is sad to think how quickly that world has passed, and how effectively the machinery of our industrial system has already taken cricket to itself. Nyren's game is no longer the entertainment of a few. It has become part of the national life, and probably, if the Bolshevists get their way here, it will be nationalised with the cinema and the theatre and association football. It is hard to find much in common between the old men who smoked long pipes and drank strong porter and watched Mr Haygarth bat three hours for sixteen runs, and the twenty thousand who flock to the Middlesex and Surrey match because the newspapers have told them to, and who barrack any batsman who plays

through a maiden over. Indeed, on those big days, I do not think that you find there the survival of the old enthusiast. You will find him rather on a cold morning shivering at the back of the mound, on the third day of a match that is certain to be a draw, when there are only a couple of hundred spectators. No one knows why he goes there. He will be very cold. He will not see particularly good cricket. Professional batsmen will play for a draw in the most professional manner. The fielding towards four o'clock will grow slack, and half an hour before the end the captains will decide that it is no good going on, and that they might just as well draw stumps. Your old man in the mound knows that this must happen. But he goes there all the same, and at three o'clock he buys an evening paper to read an account of the match and he sees that the reporter says: "Hardstaff was beaten and bowled by a yorker." And the old man will chuckle, knowing that it was a half-volley and that Hardstaff hit over it. And in January, when he reads through his *Wisden*, he will put a tick against that match, with the others that he has seen, and he will add them up and find that he has spent five more days at Lord's this year than he did the year before. He will remember how his grandfather used to talk to him of Fuller Pilch; and he will smile, knowing the superiority of Hendren. And he will continue to watch cricket as his grandfather watched it on cold days as well as warm, when a draw is certain and when there is a chance of a great finish. One day he believes the professional batsmen will fail, there will be

a collapse and a sensational victory, and only two hundred people will have seen it. He knows that many matches are played in the year and that very few of them yield great finishes, and he knows that the only way to make sure of the big occasion is to go there whenever stumps are pitched. And it is of him that we must think when we would reconstruct the cricket world of 1830.

For Nyren was the Homer of cricket and the Homeric days have passed. In 1923 the soil is no longer virgin. Cricket is a different game, and for the novelist it is less intriguing. There is no betting, there is no dishonesty, and, though we hear whispers of the questionable diplomacy of the northern leagues, it would hardly be possible to invent a cricket story with a credible villain. Nat Gould found no difficulty in writing a hundred novels of the racecourse; it is extremely difficult to write one of the cricket field. No scope is provided for dramatic narrative. Cricket in the lives of most of us is a delightful interlude—pleasant hours in pleasant company; and we do not take our success or failure very seriously. At school it is important: caps and cups are at stake, positions of authority go to the most proficient; and it so happens that the only great cricket story of recent times is a school story, P. G. Wodehouse's *Mike*. But apart from school it is hard to find in cricket a motive of sufficient strength to allow of the development and presentation of dramatic action. On the racecourse large sums of money are at stake. On the success of a horse may depend the future happiness of the hero and

the heroine. But I doubt if the result of a cricket match has in recent years ever involved much more than the temporary loss or gain of personal prestige. In *Willow the King* J. C. Snaith chose a cricket match as the setting for a summer idyll, but the author of *Brooke of Covenden* would hardly rank that story highly among his many very considerable achievements. The moment for the great cricket novel has passed: irrecoverably perhaps. And in the winter months we find ourselves returning as of old to a few books of reminiscence and to our long yellow-backed, tattered row of *Wisden*, and of the two we find *Wisden* the more companionable.

VII

WE read *Wisden* in the winter on cold nights before a leaping fire and it brings back to us the sense of new-mown grass, the feel of a cricket ball and the stir of sunlight. It is a substitute for cricket: and the old harassing doubt creeps up again, the doubt whether any literature is anything beyond a substitute, the focus of an unfulfilled desire. We know how old people drug themselves with novels. Every day they go down to the library and choose a new book, and for twenty-four hours cease to be themselves, becoming again in a story of adventure and young love all that they were and are not. Does not foiled ambition, we ask ourselves, always seek to realise itself in plays and pictures. Inevitably some side of ourselves must remain undeveloped, and through a process that the advanced psychologists describe as sublimation, we find that undeveloped side a substitute for its expression. Is a book anything more than a spade digging down to our subconsciousness, to our real self? Is anything ever quite what we take it for?

Influence: they'll talk for hours about it from the pulpit. Influence: every little thing, every word and thought and act. It has its effect on someone somewhere. I can still hear a certain old parish

priest's thin voice falling across the dark silence of benediction. It was his pet theme: influence. "They will tell you in the big world," he used to say to us, "that the strong man can be independent of his actions, that they fall from him as raindrops from a sloping roof. It may be so. Perhaps: for the very few, the very strong. But the water that falls from the clouds rests somewhere. It may slip from the sloping roofs, but it will find its level. Its level where it must complete its task, where it will rot wood, rust iron, or make the corn golden for the hands of man. Your acts, your words, your thoughts, they are like the falling rain. Somewhere they will create beauty or decay. They will never fall unheeded."

He was right, of course. Every moment of the day we impart, as we receive, impressions. But the nature of those impressions. It is there that I'm just a little doubtful. That "as we sow we reap" theory. It looks all right. It ought to be all right. But life has a way of contradicting theories. It isn't always the good tree that bears good fruit. Sometimes, unquestionably; but one fact is worth a string of arguments. Or rather, perhaps, there's no argument that can withstand a fact. And here, as my contribution to the argument, is the story of Pussy Willow, as she told it me a couple of months ago raffishly across the table of a dingy restaurant, in one of those back streets that filter through from Shaftesbury Avenue across Soho.

I drop in there quite often after closing time. There's dancing there and music, if you can so grace an unwashed foreigner's strumming on a banjo. And they've got a

licence to carry on till twelve. I don't know how they got it. They don't even call themselves a club. But they'll dump a property sandwich down in front of you and serve you, up till midnight, with villainous concocted cognac at half-a-crown a glass. It's like most of those Soho Bohemian places: a poisonous atmosphere to live in, but amusing and profitable enough to visit now and again. I like to sit quietly in a corner and watch a crowd of people, laughing and quarrelling and drinking—and try to make stories up round each of them, wondering who is in love with whom, and who will be so and so's successor. Sometimes I signal to one of them to come and share a drink with me; more often they come across of their own accord and await an invitation.

It was in this way that I met, or should rather say, perhaps, re-met, Pussy Willow. A plump, flashily, but poorly dressed woman planted herself down in front of me and announced that she was two sheets in the wind.

"Mine being," she concluded, "a double Scotch, and water, not too much of it."

"Admirable," I answered. "One double, waiter, and a benedictine."

She swallowed her double at a gulp, then leant forward across the table. "You don't know who I am?" she said.

I shook my head.

"Then I'll introduce myself. Miss Pussy Willow, late of the Vaudeville Theatre!"

She was a good actress. She had always known

how to get the most out of her voice, how to lay the bait for an effect. And she got it all right. I sat back and looked at her, looked at the puffed, swollen cheeks, the pouches under the eyes, the unshapely mouth where the powder caked along the wrinkles, the bulging double chin, and searched there, as one might search in the face of a long drowned friend for some sign of accustomed features, searched for that face, so pretty, so delicate, so appealing, so utterly, so entrancingly soubrette, that had made so many hearts beat quickly fifteen years ago. Not a trace of it. Not a trace of the woman who had once been Pussy Willow, of the radiant creature who had swayed in that great silver dress, before the chorus, singing the song that had been for six months the rage of London: "Love is the song of a girl and a boy." Gone: all of it. That youth, that charm, that divine mingling of simplicity and wantonness—buried beneath this coated unhealthy mask of flesh and powder. I did not know what to say. She was looking at me in a half-dazed, half-resentful manner, ready to hit back if what I might say should hurt her. In the end I thought it better to say nothing.

"So it's silence, is it?" she said. "Ah, well, I guessed as much. I know what you're thinking—the pity of it, that's what you're saying to yourself. Poor Pussy Willow, you'll say. Drunk herself down to this. And then you'll go back home and think what a damned fine fellow you are. And to-morrow you'll tell your friends up at the club: 'Do you know whom I saw yesterday?' you'll say. 'Pussy Willow,

quite drunk, she was. All her looks gone. You wouldn't have recognised her.' And you'll all raise your hands and say: 'The pity of it!' and get self-righteous. And then you'll go back to your office and swindle some wretched underdog and talk about leaving the world better than you found it. I know your sort. You only come here to get warm with self-righteousness. Ah, you— But, well, I'll tell you this, mister: you talk about leaving the world better than you found it, but I've probably done a sight more good in it than you have."

She paused on a high-pitched note of challenge.

But again I made no answer. I knew that I had only to wait to be told the story. I caught the waiter's eye, nodded, and another double was at her elbow. She gulped it down quickly, as she had the other. She leant forward, warmed, softened, recollective to continue on the note where she had paused. "More good than you,—a blooming sight more good than you. I saved a man once from becoming—well, you know what men become if they don't pull the reins up tight in the early thirties. Yes, me—I saved a man. It makes me laugh now when I think of it.

"I met him here a couple of months ago, just as I met you. Tall, fine-looking man, he was, white-haired, with a short, close-cut beard. Well dressed: a successful family business man—that's what he looked. Heaven knows what he thought he was doing here. Change, I suppose; an empty hour to be filled in somehow. Perhaps he used to come here when he was a boy and felt sentimental suddenly. At any rate, he

came in and stood at the corner of the bar and ordered a brown sherry and looked very self-conscious and out of place. I nudged the girl next me. 'The 396th hymn,' I said. 'Two minutes and he'll be in the pulpit.' And we laughed and had another, and told a couple of bluish stories. And then, suddenly, I found myself getting uncomfortable, and I realised that I was being stared at, stared at in a curious, creepy sort of way, as though I was being looked through for something that was behind me. It went on that stare, till I couldn't stick it any longer. I walked across to him. 'Well, old sport,' I said, 'this is me. Now, what about it?'

"He stammered a little and looked embarrassed.

"'Yes—I—I'm sorry. It was rude of me, but . . . well, you remind me very much of someone.'

"'And who might that be?' I asked.

"'An actress. You probably wouldn't know her. We thought a lot of her once—Pussy Willow.'

"It knocked me sideways, I can tell you. I thought the world had forgotten Pussy, or that those who did remember wouldn't recognise her now in what she is.

"'You ought to be a detective then,' I says, 'you've touched the right target.'

"It told. I hoped it would. He stammered: 'What! you—you really are the Pussy Willow who——'

"And suddenly, for cheek, I cocked back my hat as I used to at the jolly old Vaudeville, and I plumped my fists down on my hips and swayed backwards and began to sing the first verse of that old thing of mine

—you remember it, when I wore that great silver dress, ' Love is the song of a girl and a boy.'

" He knew then : ' Pussy Willow ! ' he murmured. Then stood looking at me as they all do, those that remember me, when I tell them who I am ; looked at me till I got all hot and shivery.

" ' Oh, come off it,' I said, ' Give me a drink, old pal.'

" He seemed to pull himself together with a start. ' I'm sorry,' he said, ' I forgot. Waiter, send a bottle of champagne over to that table and some sandwiches.'

" By the time one's got to my age one's learnt not to be surprised at anything. ' Gee, girls,' I said, ' but it's a party ! ' And I followed him across and began to chatter about old times. I thought that was what he wanted, to be made to feel young again. But I soon saw that he was not listening to what I was saying, that he had something of his own to say, but didn't know how to say it, so I just chattered on till he was ready.

" It came, all of a heap, like an explosion, right across one of my best stories.

" ' Pussy, look here—I'm . . . well, I'm not rich, but I want to do something for you. I want to—may I give you an allowance of two pounds a week ? '

" I sat back on my chair flabergasted, absolutely. It was five years since anyone had made me that sort of offer.

" ' Well,' I said, ' the old lady's a bit weatherbeaten, but what there is of her is good.'

" He shook his hand ; quite a stage gesture, quietly in front of me.

"'Oh, no, no, no,' he said. 'Please don't misunderstand me. I didn't mean anything like that—as a present, simply.'

"I tried him with a dead straight glance.

"'Now, look here, my lad,' I said, 'cough it up. What's it all about? People don't give things for nothing—not in this world, any way.'

"He nodded. 'That's why I want to do something for you. You've done me the greatest service that anyone has ever done me. I have a very happy home and three very happy children, and but for you I don't think I should have ever married.'

"That made me laugh. 'So you heard me sing: "Love me in a cottage by the sea," and caught the next train to Margate?'

"'Oh, no, no! Something—something perhaps you'd rather not be reminded of. But, do you remember when "The Eastern Princess" was running at the Clarion, and you flung up your part at a moment's notice and weren't seen again in London for six months?'

"I nodded. One of the landmarks in my life, that show was.

"'Well,' he said, 'I was twenty-seven then. I'd just passed my first medical exam. in Ireland and had come up to London to open a practice in Richmond. I wasn't badly off. I had good prospects. I was a sportsman. For eight years, ever since I had gone up to Oxford, I had been working really hard. All my friends told me that my innings was just going to begin. "You'll have a wonderful time," they said; "there's no place like London."'

" ' And then I fell in love with a very young and very unsophisticated girl, the daughter of a country parson whom I had got to know during a cricket tour. My friends did their very best to dissuade me. " It's perfect madness," they said, " you're going to chuck your life away before you've started it. You could have a wonderful time. My dear chap, don't be an ass ! " And they took me to dancing clubs, and the heat and colour mounted to my brain. I began to agree with them : marriage was a fetter, a prison house. One didn't chuck one's life away.

" ' And then I heard a rumour about you. They were saying that you had gone away because—well, your name was coupled with the producer's there. What was his name ? Ah, yes, Clive Ferguson,—and they said that you were—well—er—very ill.

" ' It'll surprise you, but I don't think anything's ever shocked me quite so much. I had heard you sing a great many times. I had made a sort of ideal of you, as young men will of actresses. You had become the embodiment to me of the gay, brightly coloured butterfly life of London ; and, when I heard that rumour, your ruin seemed a criticism of the whole life you represented. That's where it ends, I told myself. I thought of you as I had last seen you, singing in that great silver dress of yours. And then I thought of what life would be to you from then on. And I don't know, but beneath its warmth and glitter that life seemed hard and cruel and revengeful. A month later I was married, and I've been very, very happy. And —well, it's a bit late, I'm afraid, but if I can I

should like to be able to do something for you now.' "

Pussy Willow stopped speaking, tossed back her head and smiled. " And that's the way I got my beer money for life."

" And was it true ? " I asked.

" True—what true ? "

" About Clive Ferguson ? "

She laughed a loud, harsh, triumphing laugh. " True, that ! good God, no. Clive Ferguson ! I wouldn't look at him. Dirty great oily Jew. I wouldn't have looked twice at him, not that way. I expect he started that story one evening when he was drunk—sheer swank to save his vanity. Oh no, he wasn't the cause of that little jaunt of mine. No, I was away for six months, old sport, with the only man I think I've ever really cared for. A young boxer, he was, engaged to some soppy fool in the chorus. She brought him round to see us one evening. I had one look at him and made my mind up. He wasn't going to waste himself on the likes of her. God ! but I was mad about that boy. That's really what started things against me. I rushed him straight away ; didn't give him time to think ; and Clive Ferguson never forgave me. The understudy was an utter dud ; clean smashed the piece, it did, in its second month. He never forgave me. Wouldn't take me back again. And the money I spent on that boy ; all my jewellery went and the things I'd put away. And of course I couldn't keep him. One never can keep them. They use one as a stepping-stone. I never really got

over it. I shan't ever forget. But, oh, well! two pound a week for life I've got out of it.

"And if it's a woman's job in life to make a man happy, to give him a good home and children, well, I suppose I've done it. I could laugh sometimes when I think how I have done it. But it doesn't matter, does it, as long as the thing gets done."

What are you going to argue against that? and in literature as in life.

As far as effect is concerned, social and moral effect that is to say, bad books, bad deeds, are just as valuable as good. Our contempt for the best seller, is it anything but a form of intellectual snobbery, or jealousy, which is the same thing, from another side.

Best sellers!

Whenever I see, on railway bookstalls and the shelves of Mudie's library, a novel by Florence Barclay I am reminded of one of my first, certainly my strangest, school friends. He was not the conventional public-school type. He disliked games. He refused to join the corps. He had no house or school spirit. He was a fine swimmer, but never trained for the competitions. Games were compulsory. But I do not recollect to have ever seen him on the cricket field, and he played football scarcely once a fortnight. He arranged for every afternoon of the week a music lesson or a music practice. Authority let him go his own way. He was, in fact, the sort of person whom one would expect to be bullied, and thoroughly wretched generally. And yet he was not, I think, unhappy. Certainly he was never bullied. Even the swashbuckling element,

in what was admittedly a fairly boisterous community, treated him with respect. This in itself would make him a well-placed candidate for immortality. But it is his study that I particularly remember. It was the sort of study that challenged enterprise, and an old boy on seeing it was reported to have exclaimed : " Good God ! what must the house be coming to ! Why hasn't this place been shipped ? "

It was like no study that had ever been. They were small dark rooms, our studies, monastic quarters that lay under the shadow, on one side, of the abbey, and on the other, of the lindens and big school. We tried to make them brighter with light festooned wallpapers, allegorical pictures, and brackets on which we placed china shepherdesses ; to the height of four feet the walls were panelled, and fashion decreed that the woodwork should be covered with long strips of brightly coloured cloth. It was a fashion that had been handed down, like the pictures, from one generation to another. Thus in my father's day did they disfigure honest handiwork, and thus will they disfigure it when I am fifty. My friend had, however, little use for fashions. He decided that he would have his woodwork painted in mauve and black. And to match it he had the walls covered with a deep mauve paper. From the ceiling he hung before the window a mauve curtain, edged with black. On the window seat and on the chairs he heaped high a profusion of mauve cushions ; the walls, for he was a great admirer of Napoleon, he devoted exclusively to a picture gallery for the dictator. It was, in fact, a study that would, in

Chelsea, occasion a mild surprise; at school it made you reel in outraged dismay across the passage. Yet no one shipped it, no one turned the portraits of Napoleon to the wall, nor bedecked the ceiling with red ink; nor did anyone tear from their bracket beneath the gas the calf-bound set of Mrs Barclay's novels.

The Rosary was his favourite novel, as it was mine. At each fresh reading we were moved to the edge, if not over the edge, of tears. It is, in the author's words, the story of a beautiful woman in a plain shell. No man has ever seen below that surface. But one day she sings "The Rosary" at a concert: the veil is torn aside, and Garth Dalmain, the famous painter, perceives her spiritual worth. But because she fears that he will tire of her, she will not marry him, and in a scene of sustained pathos, during which the name of the Deity is never long absent from her lips, she tells him that their paths must separate. But "love never faileth." Garth is providentially blinded in a shooting accident, and his lover returns to him as a nurse. Then the drama opens. She writes him letters, which in the position of nurse and secretary she reads to him, and as his nurse she makes him gradually appreciate the intensity of his need for the woman who has refused him. And, when the last barrier has gone, the nurse reveals herself as the lover by striking triumphantly the solemn chords of "The hours I spent with thee, dear heart."

Prose narrative could, we felt, attain to no higher level of emotion, and at the end of the day, between lock up and hall, among mauve cushions we would sit

and talk of the secret springs, the hidden splendours of life, of how we, too, within a plain shell were beautiful. It passed, of course, that worship that was almost idolatry. It passed in the September of 1913, when a copy of *Carnival* was bought at a railway bookstall at the close of a summer holiday. That autumn we laid our mantle of sentiment before the tripping feet of Jenny, and when in early summer a copy of *Poems and Ballads* found its way into the school-house studies, it was the departed glory of Proserpine that we declaimed. We passed from one allegiance to another, as we passed from one size in collars to another. We were growing up.

But it is no part of my intention here, in this chapter, to attempt to trace the growth, the development, or the decay, as you may please to call it, of a literary taste. I am concerned solely with this fact: that ten years ago I held Florence Barclay to be the greatest living novelist, that in her work I found those characteristics, those qualities that to-day I find in the stories of Turgenev; that, as Turgenev moves me in 1923, so Mrs Barclay moved me in the summer of 1912. And this fact I find to be in the highest degree disquieting. There are attached to it a very large number of uncomfortable corollaries.

It depends, of course, on whether one does or does not take a relative view of things. To those who hold that there is a definite standard of literary judgment the tastes of immature, and of uneducated persons, can be of little matter. You tell your form master that you consider Swinburne a greater poet than Matthew Arnold, and he will smile indulgently: "One does

think like that at your age," he will say, "but you'll find in time that Matthew Arnold is more satisfying stuff." And I suppose one does. At any rate, the majority of middle-aged persons of my acquaintance seem to find him so. But I can never see that this fact is a proof of Arnold's superiority, any more than the fact that at forty one plays golf with greater comfort than Rugby football is a proof of the superiority of golf. In an estimate of Victorian poetry a critic considers himself to have proved his case when he has written: "Swinburne is the supreme poet of youth, but as the years pass his tempestuous flow of sound means less to us, and we increasingly appreciate the chastened, harmonious cadences of Matthew Arnold." Actually, of course, he has done no more than state that Swinburne's is the poetry of youth and Arnold's of middle age. That each poet has certain qualities and certain limitations, and in his acceptance of Arnold's superiority he has assumed that the tastes of a man of fifty are more significant, less impermanent, more surely built than those of a man of twenty-five.

It is an assumption before whose authority most young writers, especially writers of fiction, have been in their time arraigned. "These stories," the reviewer says, "are well enough written, the characters competently drawn, the situations skilfully prepared. But the book is concerned entirely with the problems of adolescence, problems, that is to say, that will in a few years' time have ceased to concern the author. Its quality, therefore, is strictly temporal." The author has been condemned, not on grounds of literary

craftsmanship, not because he has failed to do well the thing he set out to do, but because he has employed unprofitable material, because the perplexities and enthusiasms of adolescence that formed the theme of his book are transient and must yield in time to the perplexities and enthusiasms of manhood. It is doubtless inevitable that literary criticism should accept the quality of permanence as its deciding standard, should consider the period of duration rather than the intensity of the fleeting mood; but on its own grounds even would not criticism do well to seek that quality in the skill and sincerity of the treatment, rather than in the matter of the material treated?

For are the tastes of a man of fifty any more permanent than those of a man of twenty-five? Can we not still say to him: "You will feel differently when you are older. You will look back to the person that you now are as to a stranger: to a man with different affections, different ambitions, and a different way of living. These present enthusiasms of yours will in their turn pass, we can assure you. They will pass into the tepid preferences of old age, and you will sit in the smoking-room of your club, the chief pleasure of your life an immunity from gout, the chief problem of it the avoidance of a draught." Can we, with any greater justice, condemn the problems of twenty before the tribunal of forty-five than we can those of fifty before those of eighty? The brain is not useless now because it will one day soften; teeth not inefficacious because they will eventually decay. The young man will hardly listen to the impotent antiquity who

assures him that the charm of woman is a snare and an illusion. "When you have reached my age it will no longer move you." In a world of fugitive sensation there is no fixed point at which anyone can say, "thus far and no farther." We have a right to our own age; to the problems, the turmoil, the compensating enthusiasms of our age, and we have an equal right to the literature best suited for their nourishment and inspiration.

In the same way a particular period has a right to the literature best suited to its needs. Books follow a wave of recurrent popularity and depreciation. The masterpiece of 1820 is the Aunt Sally of 1850, but by 1880 it has been restored to favour. "The masterpiece is the mood, and all moods pass save Shakespeare and the Bible." This from George Moore. But of Shakespeare, as of others. He had little, or nothing, to say to the eighteenth century: to that unrivalled period of elegance and polish. They re-wrote "King Lear": they made it end happily with Cordelia in Edgar's arms. Shakespeare's tragedy was described by Mr Tate in the dedicatory epistle to his own version "as a heap of jewels, unstrung and unpolished, yet so dazzling in their disorder that I soon perceived that I had seized a treasure." We are inclined to smile at such ridiculous folly. "So that is all they knew," we say. But I think Mr Tate did wisely to rewrite "King Lear" in the idiom of his own time. The eighteenth century which produced Swift, and Addison, and Pope, was not less cultured than the century that produced Shakespeare, and Donne, and Milton, and compares very favourably

with ours that has produced—but I will not be personal. It is enough to say that the eighteenth century had a perfect right to say : " This is what we like." It could justify by its creations its exclusiveness. And, at the time, it was so very certain it was right—as certain as we are to-day that Clifford Bax is abundantly justified in the slaughter of Mr Gay's dialogue and verses that he has made in his new version of " Polly."

With what emotions, I wonder, must the wraith of John Gay have witnessed at the Kingsway Theatre the triumph of his opera. He can have hardly failed to find, after an interval of two hundred years, the enraptured reception of his work intensely gratifying. But he can equally have hardly failed to wonder what in that interval can have happened to his play. " This," we can imagine him to have said, " is all of it, of course, perfectly delightful." But it was for a very different thing that London was divided into two camps, and the Duchess of Queensberry was forbidden the Court. I wrote a political and social satire. I transported to the West Indies the most notable of my creations in " The Beggar's Opera." Mrs Trapes I placed in charge of an establishment which courtesy permitted me to describe as an " academy for young gentlewomen in song and dance." Of Macheath I made a pirate chief, disguised with a blackened face, and wedded, to his no great comfort, to Jenny Diver. In the scandalous person of Mr Ducat, the colonel of the militia, I satirised British colonial administration. Polly Peachum, who had come to the island in search of her rascal husband, alone, I permitted to be an agreeable

and virtuous creature. And by making her marry, after the well-merited execution of Macheath, the Indian Prince Cawwawkee, I established the superiority of the "noble savage" over the weak, cowardly, and self-indulgent white man. That was my opera. But of all this I find remarkably little in the version that Mr Clifford Bax has so elegantly adapted and Mr Nigel Playfair so successfully produced.

"The social and political satire has been removed, No comparison is drawn between the virtues of the black man and the white. Macheath is never even threatened with the fate that I had prepared for him, but is restored in health and charm and vigour to the eager embraces of his faithful Polly. A good two-thirds of the play is not mine at all, and though I am highly sensitive to the charms of its many bewitching lyrics, I can claim but a small share in their authorship. It is all, as I have previously remarked, perfectly delightful; but what has happened to my play?"

We like to think that Mr Gay must have, by now, realised how extremely bad his own edition was. We venture, whatever biographers may state, to discern in his work the presence of a genial unpretentious personality. By now, we say, he should have acquired a sufficient sense of detachment from the jealousies and rivalries and feuds of the early eighteenth century to realise that he himself had made a sad mess of it, that Clifford Bax is perfectly right, and that it would have been impossible for Macheath to die, or the divine Polly to be wedded to a black.

Doubtless they said much the same of Mr Tate

two hundred years ago. To the dandy of 1720 it seemed as impossible that Lear should die as is to-day the execution of Macheath. And, as Clifford Bax has found in Polly's misfortunes the single string on which might be threaded the characters and incidents that would have been otherwise irrelevant, so Mr Tate discovered in the love of Edgar for Cordelia the missing unity of Lear. Mr Gay's Polly was as impossible to-day as Mr Shakespeare's Lear was in 1720. In 2020 who knows but Mr Tate's version will be upon the boards of the Lyric, Hammersmith, and His Majesty's will be staging an unexpurgated Gay. Each age takes the food it needs. Like wine in bottles, some books deteriorate and others mature.

And, indeed, what is this posterity that we should so appeal to it? Are we not ourselves fallible and imperfect mortals, posterity to the Victorians? I can see Browning walking with Tennyson in the Elysian Fields. They discuss the literary journalism of their day. "It was bad," Browning mumbles into his beard,—"very bad indeed. There was a silly fellow called John Stuart Mill—what was it he said about that first book of mine? 'Most self-conscious thing he'd ever read.' But I didn't worry. I looked ahead. I was content to let posterity decide; and I have my reward. I read last week such a charming thing about me by, let me see now, a very vigorous young person I thought—ah, yes, Miss Rebecca West . . . ."

The other day I listened for upwards of a quarter of an hour to the complaint of a young poet whose works had been mishandled grievously in the *London Mercury*.

Highly did he heap abuse on the heads of Mr J. C. Squire and Mr Edward Shanks; nor was he less generous to critics unconnected with that periodical: to Middleton Murry, and T. S. Eliot, and Robert Lynd; one by one they were presented to the lash of ridicule. Finally the injured poet turned a loving, a valedictory eye towards the great men of the past—Matthew Arnold, Ruskin, Emerson, Carlyle. "There," he said, "were critics for you." And, after a pause: "Ah, well, in fifty years' time . . ." And he shrugged his shoulders as one who can afford to ignore such triflings in the face of time.

I said nothing. I am a placid person; I dislike quarrels. This, though, is what, if I were fashioned differently, I might have said: "My good, my very good friend," I would have said, "you despise your own generation. You are content to appeal to posterity. You place your faith in the traditions that have been handed down to you by great writers in the past. Very good, but let me remind you of this—that Matthew Arnold too despised his generation and made his appeal to posterity. It was his hope that in 1923 he would receive the commendation of Robert Lynd, of J. C. Squire, and of Edward Shanks. What was good enough for Matthew Arnold should be good enough for you. The judgments of posterity are likely to be no more profound than those of 1923. For one day this posterity that you so worship will be to-day, and in this club and in that armchair will be sitting a disgruntled poet telling an indifferent friend how much better things were done in 1923. We are no better and

no worse than other generations. We are a little different, that is all. And, because we are a little different, what you, my friend, are writing now may be more readily understood in 1950 than it is to-day. But, for that reason, your work will be of no higher quality than that of Walter de la Mare, whose verses give us such pleasure now. If you are popular in 1950 you will be little read in 1980. For that is the way things happen, and your talk about Matthew Arnold is a mixture of vanity and of snobbishness ; let me hear no more of it."

I should like to believe that there is to be found somewhere a standard of literary criticism, but the power to appreciate beauty is a quality relative to ourselves : and there are times when it seems to me to be as vain to search for a standard of beauty in literature as it would be to search for one in woman. We respond to a certain type of beauty. And we say of other types : " I am sure, my dear fellow, that she is perfectly delightful. I am not in the least surprised that you are desperately enraptured. But, for myself, as I said, she leaves me cold." We make no attempt to explain or adjudge a beauty in woman that we cannot understand. Why, then, should we speak so dogmatically of a beauty in literature that does not touch us ; why should we deny the existence of a beauty to which we are insensible ?

There was a painter once whose personality it would be discreet to hide under the pseudonym of Eric Walker. He had never seen the country. He did not know that trees existed outside the carefully tended borders

of Burnden Park. The only other stretch of grass he had ever seen was from the terraces of a football ground. For him the sky had been always dim with smoke, cut by the outline of huge chimney stacks. The only beauty he could understand was the clean, hard efficiency of a machine. With eager eyes he had seen stones lifted into the air by iron arms; he had watched the glow of furnaces flickering on polished steel. For hours on end he had stood beneath the great factory at North Town, while the sunlight cut the wreathing smoke into hard, sharp angles. The noise and glare of machinery enchanted him, and when a discerning teacher had discovered that he could draw, it was only natural that he should try to interpret in terms of line and colour those particular sights and sounds that alone had for him an æsthetic value.

Success came to him easily and quickly. He was taken up by the right people, his pictures were discussed in the right circles, and when his exhibition came on the right critics said the right things in the right papers. Eric Walker suddenly found himself rich; he came up to London, was made much of, sold his pictures easily. For six months he was the adored child of Mayfair.

After a while, however, his welcome grew less warm. At the time of his reception Gerald Garstin wrote: "Here is a young man who has successfully interpreted the hard, calculating commercialism of the North. In a fury of indignation he has revealed the soullessness of modern conditions. All his life he has been surrounded by squalor and ugliness. What may he not

do when he has seen more of life and has learnt to appreciate beauty in its fullest sense ? " And Mayfair had endorsed this opinion. " Such a wonderful young man," they would say to one another. " And to think that he spent all those years in that terrible place, nothing but smoke and chimneys. What a revelation it must be to him to come to London, and how beautifully he will be able to express it." And the patrons of modern art waited for Eric's delight to break forth in a riot of form and colour.

No such thing, however, happened. At the yearly exhibition of the Chelsea Group he was represented by a large picture of a train entering a tube station as it would be seen through the eyes of the driver. At the Florence Galleries he exhibited a picture called " Charing Cross Road," in which a small boy stood watching the glowing furnaces of Messrs. Crosse and Blackwell, and to the New Movement Society he contributed " Liftman at Piccadilly Circus." The announcement that he was at work on " Surrey and Middlesex at the Oval " gave promise of better things, but his followers were again disappointed. In a far corner of the canvas was a patch of green and one white figure, the remainder was occupied by the telegraph and the gasometers. It was generally agreed that Eric Walker had not fulfilled his promise.

" Interesting though this work may be," wrote Gerald Garstin, " it cannot by any stretch of the imagination be called beautiful, and without beauty where is art ? " Once again Mayfair echoed the pronouncement of its trusted critic. " It's not beautiful

all that harping on machinery and ugliness. I am sure he can't have a nice mind. Why doesn't he look on the pleasant side of things ? "

To Eric Walker this change of front came abruptly and incomprehensibly. " Beauty," he said. " Beauty, what do they mean ? Aren't my pictures beautiful ? " To him there was nothing in the world lovelier than the angles that sunshine cut in smoke, than the glow of a furnace on damp flesh, than the smooth, hard rhythm of a piston. " Beauty," he said, " that's the one thing I have really striven for, to get the full value of these things I have enjoyed, to interpret the magic of these sounds and colours, to make others realise the perfect form, poise, balance of a machine. What do they mean ? "

In the end he took his troubles to Mrs Abbot, a kindly, sentimental woman, who had always rather mothered the young artist. To her he poured out all his troubles, telling her how they misinterpreted his work, calling it ugly.

" But, my dear boy, it is ugly ! "

" Ugly ! Oh, but, Mrs Abbot. Why, come here. Look out there. Do you see the great chimney-stack of the Gas Works ? Do you see how the red glare shines out against the black roofs ; what could be lovelier ? "

And he leapt up, seizing her hand, dragging her to the window. Gradually Mrs Abbot pacified him.

" My dear boy," she said, " I dare say you may like that sort of thing, but you'll find that it's not what we think nice, and it's what other people think nice that

matters. Those chimneys of yours are all very well, and I know you're fond of them, but the things we call beautiful are not a bit like that."

"No?"

"No, of course not," she went on, "the things we like—well, trees, fields, love—oh, you know, the joy, the beauty of life. Those are the things you ought to be painting."

Eric Walker gazed out fondly at the red glare of the factory as it shone glimmering on the surrounding roofs, then he turned sadly to the water-colours that hung on the walls, soft and delicate, roses and arbours, with a suggestion of Love, fleeting and perilously dear. For him there was no beauty there—only cowardice, weakness and evasion.

That evening Mrs Abbot had a long and serious talk with her husband about her young protégé.

"Something must be done, Harry," she said. "He's such a dear boy, and he's absolutely spoiling his chances. Now I tell you what we must do. We must take him right away from all this to some primitive, natural spot. When once he gets free from sordid influences he'll respond to beauty like a child."

Mr Abbot had been married twenty years, and had learnt that his personal comfort was only to be purchased by a complete indulgence of his wife's fancies.

"All right, my dear," he said, "we'll see what can be done."

And so arrangements were made. An invalid friend owned a small house on an island in the Pacific, which he was willing to let for a summer holiday. Mrs

Abbot leapt at the opportunity, and with Eric Walker submitting as to an intractable decree of Fate, within five weeks he and Mr and Mrs Abbot were leaning over the taffrail of the ship watching the churned foam stretch out in a white line behind them.

The island was certainly very charming. The air was soft and scented, the deep blue of the sky merged almost imperceptibly into the deeper blue of the sea. The garden was full of rich flowers and luxuriant growth ; the sunshine was full and heavy ; it was the kind of island which one never expects to see, but of which one dreams fondly, hopelessly.

" Now," said Mrs Abbot, " you'll be able to paint wonderful pictures, won't you, Eric ? "

" I hope so," he said, gazing round with puzzled eyes at this world that, for all its riot of colour, lacked so strangely the sights and sounds to which he was accustomed.

For four days he wandered round with his sketch-book and water-colours. First of all he tried to draw the little house that was overgrown with fruit and flowers, but the lines blurred into one another, and he could not find the clear-cut form that he understood. Then he tried to paint the sunlight as it flickered on the waves, but its movement was irregular and spasmodic, unsuited to his method, and he failed equally when he tried to interpret the sway of the branches and the lazy droop of the oranges. He was puzzled, unhappy, unable to understand why things so vague and indefinite should be called beautiful. Mrs Abbot's large, kindly voice quite failed to comfort him.

"Wait for your inspiration to come," she would say. "Just walk about and absorb all that's round you, and you'll be painting before you know where you are."

And next day it seemed as though her prophecy had been fulfilled. Eric had gone out directly after breakfast with his easel, paints, and canvas. They had seen nothing of him the whole morning; he had not come back to lunch, and by tea-time there were still no signs of him.

"I knew it," said Mrs Abbot, "I knew it. We only had to take him away and put him in fresh surroundings; he was bound to respond to beauty, he only needed the sunshine."

As soon as she had finished her tea she set out to look for him, garrulous with excitement.

"Now what do you think it will have been that moved him? I wonder if it was the bay. No, he was standing on the top of the hill and he looked down and saw the village lying there in the sunlight! You take my word for it, we shall find him on the hill!"

But they did not find him on the hill, nor was he painting the bay nor the orange grove, and they sought him in vain on the skirts of their little orchard. At last they began to feel a little nervous and began to ask one another fretfully whether any harm could have come to him. They made inquiries of the natives, but learnt nothing, and it was not till almost dinner-time that a fisherman told them where he was.

"The young artist? Yes, sir. I saw him early this morning go into that little broken hut on the edge of the shingle, and though I have been working here all

day I haven't seen him come out. He's probably there still."

Mr and Mrs Abbot looked at each other askance. What could Eric want in that small dilapidated house that was slowly falling to pieces over the head of an old shrivelled woman and her daughter? At the thought of the daughter Mrs Abbot began to blush. What if the south wind and the sudden beauty had moved Eric to express himself in terms more personal than those of paint? Artists were notoriously immoral, and the islanders, she had always heard, unfortunately weak.

She hurried on, her heart beating quickly, excited and perturbed.

In a few moments, however, all her fears for the innocence of the gentle islander were banished. For there, at the back of the small hut, an old woman, black and shrivelled, was cooking her dinner over an iron stove. Her neck and arms were bare, and the red glow of the fire shone dimly on the damp flesh, the dying sunlight stealing in one long, broad band through a chink in the woodwork fell across her throat, cutting the curves of her hanging breasts into hard, sharp angles, and a few yards away Eric Walker was working at his canvas in a fine frenzy of inspiration.

VIII

WHAT is beauty to one man is ugliness to another. There is a proverb "about one man's meat"; but there is a chariness about applying it to literature. Writers like to believe that a criterion of criticism exists; that their work is definitely good, bad, or indifferent.

Well; we are creatures of infinite limitations. A certain range of sentiment comes within the province of our comprehension; vast tracts of life must be for all time to us an unknown country. J. C. Squire announces that *Jurgen* is a poor book, but he does not persuade us that our admiration has been misplaced. We regard his article as the statement of a personal dislike. For criticism in the end comes always back to this: "I like it, or I do not like it." Criticism is autobiography, as these pages are autobiography, the expression of personal preferences and distastes. And, on the whole, I think critics are ill advised to write of books that they do not like. Their inability to appreciate the book is as likely to be their fault as the author's. And I find myself singularly out of sympathy with the type of critic who tries to explain his enthusiasms and disapprovals by metaphysics. He discusses for three pages what he considers to be the

function of literature. "Literature," he concludes, "is the sublimation of phenomena." And, for the remainder of his article, proceeds to show which poets do, and which do not, satisfy the requirements of his formula. And, of course, he leaves us unimpressed. The ability to conduct an argument is not a proof of literary taste. And if the substance of the article is to be "I like, or do not like, this book," then the critic is beholden to persuade us that he is a person whose opinion is deserving of attention. He can prove it to us in two ways, preferably in both. He can show that he has read and appreciated a quantity of good literature. "A man," we say, "who has really appreciated Turgenev, should have a standard implicit in his emotional response to other books. If he says this book is good, there must be something in it." Or the critic may prove by writing well and interestingly that he has a sense of literature. For there is nothing more damning to a book than a favourable, but ill-written, notice. "If the ass who wrote this," the reader thinks, "liked that book, then I'm pretty certain that I shouldn't." Criticism would carry much more weight if it would forget its sense of responsibility, and would remember that its purpose is, as that of all literature, the entertainment of the reader.

And so back to that original, that disconcerting fact that Florence Barclay was to me ten years ago an equivalent for Turgenev. She meant as much; she revealed as much. She touched the heart as surely and as deeply. And again comes that uncomfortable knowledge that a book is after all only a focus for

ourselves, a spade to unearth the absolute. And does it matter what sort of a spade you use as long as the work gets finished? The object of any emotion is of less matter than the intensity of the emotion that object has evoked. Is a love any the less real, less tender, less passionate, less unselfish because it has been inspired by a shallow, trivial, worthless woman? Does it very much matter whence we derive that state of heightened consciousness that we undoubtedly reach through literature, as long as we do reach it? We come the richer from *King Lear*, from *Anna Karenin*, from *Lycidas*, because these books have revealed to us what is eternal in ourselves. In their company we have forgotten momentarily the anxieties, the ambitions, the frivolities that dazzle and distract us, that move in glittering, bewildering profusion on the surface of our lives, that belong to time and space. In such moments of heightened consciousness we are in harmony with ourselves, we see ourselves as a part of that pattern that Pater spoke of, the pattern whose threads pass out on either side of us.

And it is towards such moments that we are always striving, for the most part indirectly, striving in our work, our love affairs, our amusements and distractions. We are dissatisfied with what we are and with what we have. That which is immortal in us struggles towards what is remote, in the hope, in the belief that it may prove immortal. It may be that books add something to our emotional, our intellectual stature, that they are the rich soil in which we dig for treasure; but I prefer to think that we are the rich soil, that we con-

tain an immortal spirit, and that our ultimate success or failure must be judged by our ability to keep that spirit nourished and alive. If this be so, and it is a philosophy that commended itself to Wordsworth, are we not right in saying that Florence Barclay and Turgenev are fulfilling a similar function in different spheres?

There is no difference in the quality nor the intensity of the emotion. I am, I believe, tone deaf, and I have a perfectly deplorable taste in music. But by some music I am very profoundly moved. Sometimes it is by music with which I have personal associations—marches and dance tunes, and that, of course, strictly speaking, should not count. The emotion is inspired not by the music, but the scene evoked through it. But quite often it is by some catchy affair heard for the first time in a restaurant or across a street. I listen to it with enraptured pleasure, thrilled by the tricks and twiddles and syncopations, and I am quite prepared to accept my companion's assurance that it is a cheap, vulgar, sentimental thing. "I do not care," I say, "these things are relative. It moves me, therefore to me it is a masterpiece."

Everyone has, I suppose, at one time or another paused to examine the windows of the type of bookshop that abounds in certain streets in the west end of London. They are curiously alike, these places. One side of the window is stocked with articles the nature of which it is unnecessary to particularise, and the other side with such literature as the management appears to consider most likely to

encourage the purchase of them. The selection of that literature does not greatly alter with the passage of time. There are no spring and autumn seasons in these bookshops. Occasionally some new novel finds a home there; occasionally a callous or unenterprising publisher allows some fading favourite to pass from circulation. But there is, on the whole, a commendable fidelity to old friends. Were you to be transplanted miraculously to the Piccadilly of 1926 you would find of the volumes that to-day adorn so proudly the front tables of Mr Hatchards' bookshop scarcely half a dozen, but the appearance of the questionable shop window will be probably no more altered by 1930 than it has been since 1910. Victoria Cross will be there, and Elinor Glyn, and the confessions of the retiring aristocrat who is content to sign himself "A Peer." There will be the same French classics, *Droll Stories*, *Madame Bovary*, *A Woman's Life*. The alliterative titles of Gertie de S. Wentworth James will show against a circle of entwining arms. Between *Bel-ami* and *Anna Lombard* will be spread enticingly *A Bed of Roses*. The public, whatever it be, that patronises such establishments knows its mind.

They are good hat-racks, these bookshops, for ridicule, for denunciation, for satire. They can make a sermon for the priest, a middle for the journalist, a simile for the politician. For the student of life they are a subject of speculative curiosity.

What is, we ask ourselves, this public with so catholic a taste? We rarely see anyone enter one of these bookshops. There are always two or three people

gazing enviously at the window, but self-consciousness restrains them. They dare not publicly declare their interest by purchasing a volume. Indeed, there are times when we wonder how these shops carry on their business at all. Are they, we wonder, a spectacle and nothing else? Do the same books remain there from one season to another for the simple reason that no one buys them? A pleasant fancy, but apparently they do carry on a very excellent, a very thriving, trade. I once asked a proprietor if the trade slump had at all affected him. "Very little," he said. "Just before the armistice I ordered two thousand copies of *Five Nights*, and I sold the last one yesterday."

Two thousand copies of one book in one shop in three years. That man must have sold on an average two copies of *Five Nights* every day. Can Mr Bumpus say as much for Shakespeare? Two thousand copies in three years! It is easy, of course, to shrug one's shoulders, to say: "But for such stuff there will always be a public." And yet so vague a gesture provides no explanation of this incredible popularity. The appeal of *Five Nights* is not, I believe, due to what bishops describe as the baser instincts of human nature. Victoria Cross wrote it in the innocence of her heart, firmly believing it to be a good book. It is a sincere book as *The Rosary* is sincere, and *The Way of an Eagle* is sincere. It is written with feeling; she enjoyed writing it. Its sentimental sensuality is warm and cloying and pleasant, like a hot bath after too good a dinner. There even comes a moment when the heat of the bath mingling with the heat of Pommard makes

us ask ourselves whether it is such appalling drivel after all. A couple of pages more we decide it is; but there was that moment of doubt.

Thus it happens, I conjecture.

The shop assistant as he hurries homewards at the close of his day's work is moved with a sense of envy for the eager life of pleasure that wakes in the city only at the moment that he leaves it. His own life is tedious, with small excitements. He feels the need of vicarious sensation. The cover and title of Miss Cross's masterpiece allures him. And as he journeys home he is pleasantly excited by the description of the painter's intrigue with the Chinese. He feels otherwise, however, when he meets the heroine, and is confronted with what appears to him as a picture of nobility and self-sacrifice. He is deeply moved. That it is bad literature does not matter. It is enough that it should arouse in him the same thoughts and emotions that *Anna Karenin* stirs in a man of letters. He feels himself in touch with a great passion, a passion that can override the convention of an hour and a place, that destroys life but makes of it first a thing worth having. In the world of popular fiction *Five Nights* bears to *The Rosary* the same relation that in the world of literature *Manon Lescaut* bears to *On the Eve.*

I read while I was a prisoner in Germany Elinor Glyn's novel, *Three Weeks*, and I remember thinking that it was of its kind the very worst novel that I had ever read. The grand passion is as rare as genius, and it is as difficult to make the grand passion convincing in

a novel as to make a genius convincing. The novels in which a grand passion has been " got over " could be counted on the fingers of one hand. But never, I felt, had any novel of passion failed more lamentably, more inexcusably, than *Three Weeks*.

But, as I said, these things are relative. To a couple of my fellow-captives *Three Weeks* was a window opening on the immortal meadows. For days they discussed it exhaustively from every point of view. It was, they were agreed, marvellously done. But they were doubtful of its morals; such ardour, they felt, was only permissible after a marriage ceremony, or, they were prepared to concede, as a prelude to one. But it was the less real part of them that doubted. Their instincts told them that the grand passion makes its own laws. And finally they yielded to their deeper nature.

" After all," they said, " those two were different from the rest of us. They were wonderful characters. You can't judge them as you judge ordinary people."

It is with such words that we acquit Paolo and Francesca, Antony and Cleopatra, Lancelot and Guinevere. *Three Weeks* said to my fellow-captives what *Antony and Cleopatra* says to a cultured public. It was a focus for their belief in the grand passion.

One may well wonder, though, in what spirit the man who is deeply stirred by Victoria Cross and Elinor Glyn reads such masterpieces of prose narrative as *Une Vie* and *Madame Bovary* and *Mademoiselle de Maupin*. They are bound in the same lurid cover, printed on

the same absorbent paper, and yet it is hard to believe that a man can be moved equally by what is good and by what is bad. Is it not more likely that he will be shocked and a little disgusted by Maupassant's detachment and cold restraint? "Pretty hot stuff," he will say to himself of *Une Vie*, but will add, "most awful filth." And he will be ashamed of the book, and secrete it at the bottom of his chest of drawers. A melancholy reflection. It is, after all, of little matter that two thousand people should in the course of three years purchase at one shop a rather silly, sensual, sentimental book. But it is a little sad that only thus, in this form, and in this type of shop, should be procurable in the English language a complete translation of one of the world's greatest novels, a little sad that even then it should be only read by such a person, and in such a spirit.

Sad though for the man of letters, not for the advocate of social progress. I am convinced that these books are as completely harmless as any book that may possibly encourage people to think for themselves can be harmless.

There appeared a few months ago an article, I believe, by St John Ervine, maintaining that the effect on the mind of the public of books such as *The Way of an Eagle*, with their scenes of brutality and masculine domination, was pernicious. And certainly they make melancholy enough reading. But what are they, after all, but an expression for our eternal human impulse to be swept off our feet, to be subjugated by a force outside of and stronger than ourselves. And cannot we find

in literature equivalents enough for the cracked whip and the submissive cheek of an Ethel Dell romance? Equivalents, but not parallels; for the best seller is written for women, usually by women. And it is by a masculine intelligence that the masterpieces of prose literature have been produced. A man would, in search of such an equivalent, choose an experience of which he was the object, not the subject. He would not write of the dominant male, but of the siren. "Is it to be a kiss or a blow?" asks the hero of popular fiction. In Turgenev, that woman who "when she comes towards one, seems as though she is bringing all the happiness of one's life to meet one," leans forward across a table and taps the nails of one hand against the nails of the other. "Tell me, tell me," she says, "is it true, they say you are going to be married?"

It is from such reflections that we are forced to ask ourselves how much purpose is served by our attempts to educate the public up to Shakespeare. We are only giving them an equivalent for what they already have. And the energy that we devote so prodigally to the organisation of lectures and bazaars and repertory theatres might be spent so very much more profitably on ourselves. I doubt if the Ethel Dell public would find life any fuller, any more enraptured, by an exchange of *The Knave of Diamonds* for *Jude the Obscure*.

I suspect, indeed, that these educational movements are inspired subconsciously for the most part, by the novelist's desire to increase his own public. "If only," he says, "a sixth part of the 60,000 who buy each novel by Ethel Dell would divert their attention towards

my admittedly superior work, how salutary it would be for them and how charming it would be for me ! " It sounds pleasant enough, but they are dangerous things, these revolutions, and they have a way of turning on their organisers. On the whole, I prefer to leave things as they are. It would be perfectly delightful if that 60,000 public were to transfer its affection to my humble efforts. If the public could be educated to a wide appreciation of the tendenz novel, very well, very admirably well. But this talk of Shakespeare and Fielding and the giants of the eighteenth century, frankly, I distrust it. I have no wish to see the public educated to that degree. Were it so to be, I can see that myself and many other deserving and inoffensive persons would have to seek some other means of livelihood—a procedure that would be most distasteful. For were the public able to appreciate Fielding and Balzac, and Smollett and Thomas Hardy, I cannot believe that it would take much interest in the stories that I should have to tell it. I distrust these Literature Promotion Leagues. I am disturbed when a new edition of Trollope is put upon the market. But a deep content consumes me when I open my Sunday newspaper and see that the publishers of Miss Dell's new novel have " called " already for a seventh printing. I smile. Things are as they have been. The old standards remain. And I feel that there are still left a few people whom my publishers may be able to persuade to take some interest in my writings.

IX

I SAID that Florence Barclay was an equivalent for Turgenev. But I could wish that, eleven years ago, I had elected to read some popular writer in whom I could trace a closer parallel, a similarity of plot as well as atmosphere. For it would not be difficult to find in the *Family Herald* stories that would in synopsis seem to resemble very closely those of Turgenev. The plot of *On the Eve* or *A House of Gentlefolk* might well have appealed to the writer of slushy sentimental romances. In the type of story that Turgenev wrote, the story of memory and regret, the boundary between excellence and rubbish is very narrow, and only a lax sentimentalist or a man of genius would attempt to tell it. Talent would be frightened by the simple triangle of *Spring Floods* and of *Smoke*. It would seem ordinary, as would that of *Rudin* and *The House of Gentlefolk*. A man's wife is unfaithful. He leaves her, and in time, believing her to be dead, falls in love with a young girl and proposes marriage. But the wife returns and his happiness is shattered. "What!" says the professional novelist, "that old theme; the person who returns from the grave at the eleventh hour and upsets everything. But that has been done a hundred times. It is impossibly *vieux jeu*. In farce, in light opera,

perhaps, but in serious drama. . . ." The writer of talent must take unusual and difficult situations. He must find originality in the employment of new material. The broad field has been ploughed too many times, has yielded too many harvests. It must lie fallow for a while.

I remember talking once with W. L. George of the eternal appeal of a good story, and of how the first business of the novelist was to tell a story. "Possibly," he said, "but I will tell you a true story, a universal story, and you will not dare to write it. It is the story of Edwin and Angelina. Edwin is a clerk in the office of Angelina's father. He is sent up to the house with messages for his employer, and passes Angelina in the hall. Their eyes meet and he knows that he is in love. A few days later there is a football match between the office team and that of a neighbouring factory. Edwin wins the match with a brilliant last-minute goal, but in doing so he breaks his arm. Angelina is watching the match. Edwin becomes her hero. Soon afterwards they again meet in the hall. She asks him about his arm. They talk together, and discover in a short while that they are in love. Of course, Angelina's father refuses to countenance the match. He has his own plans for his daughter. The lovers are forbidden to meet. Angelina falls sick. They send her to the South of France; but she grows worse. She is listless and despondent. The doctor says that unless she is given an interest in life she will die. All that money can provide is showered on her. But she becomes thinner and paler every day. At last

the mother intervenes, 'She must see Edwin.' The father tardily assents. There is a reunion of the lovers, and the miracle happens. The book ends with marriage bells. It is a true story," he concluded, "but you wouldn't dare to write it."

I agreed. "Only two people could write it," I said. "Turgenev, or a merchant of popular fiction."

Turgenev is always obvious. He employs none of the devices of surprise and of suspended interest on which the writer of talent depends for his effects. The waters of Turgenev's narrative are so smooth, so clear, and bring the river bed so close to us that we hardly realise how deep they are. It is not till we see the blunders that others make with the Turgenev technique that we realise to what an extent he is supreme. And it is such a simple technique. The passage of youth; the waning power of love; the recompenses of middle age; memory and regret, and a serene twilight that harmonises and consoles. It is of these things that Turgenev speaks—simple things, and he speaks of them simply, through a technique that is miraculously adequate and sure. A man in the middle years finds under two layers of cotton a little garnet cross; three men sitting round a table talk of love; a young man, betrothed and happy, returns at night to his hotel to recapture, in a room filled with the overpowering scent of heliotrope, the buried anguish of an earlier love. A man sits in a garden, and remembers. It looks so easy; and yet, in mediocre work, how the machinery creaks. How artificial become the excuses for recollection. A violin playing in a certain restaurant, after many

years, a tune to which the hero danced when young. A narrative that closes where it began, in the same place, on the same note, with the same sentence. What is pattern in Turgenev becomes in lesser writers a series of devices.

And yet it is thus that life is always getting its effects; sometimes with our co-operation. We return after certain months to the ball-room where we first encountered love, to the restaurant where we first spoke of love, to the woods that were the shelter and the screen of our first love-making. But at such moments the scene has been set too carefully; the climax is manufactured. We have known beforehand the nature of the emotion we are to experience; we force it to the required pitch of intensity. And that is bad technique. Only if we stand aside and let life tell our story for us, shall we happen on the inevitable, the unpremeditated moment.

In the early spring of 1921 I wrote a sketch of an ex-officer; it was an attempt to interpret the spirit of post-war disillusionment, and I selected as its subject a clerk in a large advertising agency and christened him Evan Miller.

He occupied in Johnson's renowned establishment an obscure position. He sat in a small room with two male typists at the top of three flights of stairs. He sorted out press cuttings, despatched the right copy to the right papers, entered up the proofs in a large folio, checked the returned slips, supplied a head clerk with lists giving the space rates and percentages allowed to agents. It was routine work that required an orderly

mind; that quality Miller possessed, and his employers estimated its value at three pounds five shillings a week. An unexciting job for a man who three years earlier had been in command of a company of Fusiliers.

But it was the best he had been able to find, and his friends had assured him that he had been remarkably lucky to get it. As soon as the Armistice was signed he had commenced a series of desperate assaults on the War Office; he had claimed in turn to be a pivotal man, an educational authority, a university student. He had even considered an appeal on sympathetic grounds. Finally, he was allowed to transfer his commission from the regular army to the reserve of officers, and in April he was able to walk a free man down Savile Row and carefully finger the tailor's samples of tweed and serge. Great days, undoubtedly. He had a good balance at Cox's; a large gratuity was due to him. For two months he enjoyed himself. Then he began to look for a job. He had hoped vaguely for some sort of Government post with a good salary and not a great deal of work. But he soon discovered that Whitehall was more than full, and that civil service jobs abroad were going to the men from the Universities. He felt lost in a world that moved so fast and with such complete detachment from his interests.

At last, through the influence of a fellow-officer, he had got this advertising job. "And very lucky too," he had been told.

Miller did not appreciate his fortune. At first he had managed to work himself into a mood of self-complacence; every evening, as he walked home from

the office, he had reminded himself that a year ago he had been standing in a narrow trench waiting for the stand to, with the prospect of a cold night, to be spent either in patrols or in working parties; whereas now he was going back to a good dinner, a warm fire, and, afterwards, a soft bed—a very different proposition. And, as he sat reading the paper, he remembered pleasantly the cold wind that swept over the lonely hills. He always thought of France as he walked home. "A year ago," he would say to himself, and try to reconstruct the scene; where had he been, what had he been doing, what had he thought; only twelve months ago he had belonged to a different life.

And then, when November had passed, it was "two years ago" that he found himself saying, for, after the Armistice, there had not seemed anything particular to remember. "Two years ago"—and he saw himself once again in the mud and cold of Bullecourt during those dark weeks over which had hung the menace of the great advance; strangely quiet days. There had been rain in January, cruel driving rain; the main trench had been three feet deep in mud and men had stuck in it for hours. But February had been fine and warm with a suggestion of spring. They had been out of the line just then, and he had gone for long rides to Peronne and Baupaume in the faint mild sunshine. He had been very happy, and the memory of that happiness caused him an insidious disquiet. As he walked back from the office he found himself thinking less of the mud and cold, the fatigue and danger, than of the warm comfort of the mess; the friendliness

of those long evenings, when they sat round the stove and had opened bottle after bottle of port. In particular, he remembered that last night at Ervillers, when they had collected a huge beam from a neighbouring ruin and had piled up an enormous fire; he remembered how they had undressed before it, and how the light had flickered on past midnight, and that when he had woken at three o'clock, it had still glowed dimly. They had had good times, and he could not help contrasting them with this present uneventful routine of home and office. Nothing unexpected ever happened. An evening of desultory conversation. Bed. Next morning the hurried breakfast; the scramble for shoes and hat and coat; the uncomfortable journey in the tube, with the same faces opposite him, the same heavy, taciturn, discontented faces; and the squash in the lift; the bad-tempered, ill-mannered crowd; and, afterwards, from 9.30 till 5.30 in that small room at the top of the third flight of stairs with two male typists, with neither of whom he had anything in common and who were both secretly a little glad to see an ex-officer reduced to the same position as themselves, he sat arranging proofs, checking the copy, filing lists.

Occasionally he had to answer an inquiry on the telephone, and this was the one excitement of his day. The telephone had always possessed a fascination for him, and whenever he heard the bell ring in the next room he would put down his pen and wait, listening for the sound of a chair pushed back, an opened door, and the short, "Mr Miller, you're wanted on the

'phone." It was always the same thing—an inquiry about space rate, or the date of a special issue, but he never failed to experience a tremor of excitement as he ran into the next room and took up the receiver.

Nothing unexpected ever happened; there was nothing to look forward to; each day was exactly like the one that had gone before; he did not, indeed, see how anything could ever happen now. He would remain in that office for the rest of his life. In the end he might become manager of a department. At the age of forty he might have a large enough salary to be able to think of marriage. Forty! How often had they agreed in the mess that love was the privilege of the young. As far as he could see, everyone else was in the same boat. He used to go round occasionally to the long bar at the Troc: a melancholy sight. In 1917 it had been full of young officers, eager, lighthearted, home on leave with pay in their pockets and in their hearts a reckless determination to make the most of what little time was left them. The same fellows were there now, young men in mufti, leaning across the bar sipping their cocktails, raising their glasses to the light, exchanging their "cheeriohs." But the lightheartedness had left them; their faces were set in lines of sullen discontent; they would stand and talk together of France and their experiences there. The unpleasant memories had been effaced. Already they had forgotten. They were unhappy in the present; they remembered they had been happy in the past.

And, with a vague nostalgia, Miller appreciated that in France, in spite of the danger and discomfort,

there had been always something to look forward to. There had been the mail, a relief, the taking over of a new bit of line, a continual change, and there had been leave—how wonderful that had been, to count the days to one's leave, to say to one's self : " in twenty-three days' time I shall be in London " ; there was nothing like that now. And peace : how often he had talked of it, of all the things he would do, *après la guerre* ; the future had seemed to him boundless then with opportunities. He had looked forward with a happy confidence to the days of routine and quiet work. He had asked nothing more than that—the resumption of the ordered ways.

He remembered, too, in what spirit he had read three years earlier a novel by Zola called *The Soil.* He had seen a copy at the railway bookstall at Boulogne with " Suppressed English Edition " printed in thick black lettering across the yellow cover. He was on his way back from leave and he had hoped that the book would help him to pass agreeably the long journey to Baupaume. But he had found it heavy even in its obscenity, and he had discarded it for the light suggestion of *Fantasia* and *Le Rire.* Later, however, during the nights of wakefulness in a lonely post, he had returned, for want of anything else to read, to Zola, and he had soon found to his surprise that, instead of turning the pages quickly with prurient fingers in search of the flavoured passage, he was reading the book carefully, word by word, letting it pass slowly before his eyes—a savage spectacle of human life held captive to the soil, of men and women whose

actions and desires were controlled by their allegiance to it, and of that fierce ferment of deceit, greed, falsehood, wantonness that the soil turned in its own way to its own use.

It had seemed strange to him, though, that Jean, an old soldier, should be prepared, even after so much adversity, to rejoin the army. It was easy to forget; memory, concerned with the general proportions of a picture, selected what it chose; Miller knew that, but could anyone, he had asked himself, forget the fatigue of a long march, the chill of nightfall in the open, the heartache of separation, the fields of blood and pain. And, putting the book down on the table, he had walked to the head of his dug-out steps and looked out over the long stretch of mangled country. Himself, he never could forget.

But that had been three years earlier, under the flicker of a Verey light, within the range of guns. And now, sitting at a desk with a pile of press-cuttings before him, and the clatter of typewriters beating on his ear, he felt prepared to welcome any change, however violent. If only something would happen. That evening as he walked down Kingsway to Holborn station the newsboys were shouting tidings of another war; across the placards a huge note of interrogation followed the word Berlin. Was it then to begin again —the noise, the cruelty, the carnage? For a moment there passed before his eyes a picture of Passendael as he had last seen it in the October rains, the dead tilted across the lips of shell holes. Then his thoughts returned to the present and its more urgent trouble,

the monotony of routine; the type-writers; the proofs; the copy. "Allies to march to Berlin! Paper! Ultimatum to Germany! Paper!" The words were flung out into the mild spring air and the sound floated heedlessly down Kingsway over the heads of the workers, old and young, who were hurrying towards their homes, with faces set in hard lines of dull, sullen resentment. "Start of a New War! Paper!" If only something new would happen. "Ultimatum to Germany! Paper! Allies—Berlin—Paper!" And Evan Miller, in his heart of hearts, hoped that it was true.

That is the story as I wrote it. But life from its vast repertoire can produce always when it chooses, a climax far more complete than any of our contrivance. Sometimes, impatient with our fumbling, it takes the pen from us and writes.

Three weeks later a trade dispute brought England nearer to revolution than it had been for a hundred years. The regular reserve was recalled to the colours and Evan Miller found himself at Shorncliffe reporting at orderly room his existence and unimportance; curiously easy, he would discover, the re-adoption, after an absence of two years, of the formalities of military life; curious, too, how stabilising became, after the casual nature of town engagements, the fixed routine of the parade-ground and the mess. But that would be personal and incidental. The significance, the universally applicable significance of that six weeks' return to uniform would lie in the chance discovery in the pocket of an old

tunic of a piece of paper, placed there hurriedly and forgotten, two years before. There would be nothing romantic about that piece of paper. A memo. from battalion dated the 17th of February 1919. "Please note," it said, "that you were passed fit for active service by the Medical Board at Dover, the 3rd of December 1918." Formal enough: to anyone but himself, meaningless enough. The sort of thing with which a dug-out would have become quickly littered had he not possessed a servant. But its discovery would be, for him, that inevitable, that unpremeditated moment, at which every story-teller is aiming and so rarely reaching. He would stand in the centre of the room, the piece of paper in his hand, and before his eyes, and before his brain, the details of the circumstances under which he had last seen it.

In the early spring of 1919 a couple of months' leave had been granted to all regular officers, and a very great number of them had taken advantage of that leave to file their application for transference to the reserve of officers. It was on the last morning before his leave that he had found waiting for him in the anteroom that memo. from battalion correcting a mistake he had made in his application for leave. He had laughed gaily, confidently. They could send their memos. if they liked, he had told himself. To-morrow he would be in London, and if, during two months, he could achieve no compromise with the Whitehall mandarins he had no right to call himself a soldier. And he pushed the note away into his pocket.

The recovered memory of that gesture of careless

confidence would be a mirror in which he could see reflected the significance of the last two years. He would see himself two years earlier, eager and exuberant, tired of army life, anxious for a return to freedom, proudly assured of his capacity to subdue the future. He would remember how his one idea in those days had been to rush away from camp. For the sake of eleven hours in town he had caught a five o'clock train from Grantham on Sunday morning and had not got back to bed till three o'clock. The journey had cost him twenty-seven shillings. His first question on joining a new unit had been, " What chance of leave ? " No matter how far from town, how long, how expensive, how uncomfortable the journey—he had been prepared to make it : anything to get back to civil life. And he would see himself now in this aftermath of turmoil, indifferent, passive, dumbly satisfied. He had hardly considered the question of leave. It would cost him over a pound to get to town ; it wasn't worth it. There would be very little for him to do when he got there. A theatre, a dance, a dinner. It was pleasanter on the whole to sit and read *Blackwood's* in the mess and play bridge and walk across the cliffs to Folkestone. He had nothing in particular that he wanted to do. He was well enough where he was. The old zest for life had gone, pilfered from him by two years of frustration and disappointment and foiled endeavour. And the realisation of it would be brought to him by the discovery of a crumpled memo., a thing intrinsically worthless, but the focus, the rallying-point of much hard circumstance.

And thus, indeed, it was that, to one at least of many thousands, was brought fully and bitterly the significance of that post-war period, of those treacherous, deceiving years that had glittered so bravely on the horizon, that had looked so warm and hospitable, that had promised so much and had brought so little.

1919 was the year of disillusion, not merely of a political disillusion, of disgust at broken faith and forgotten promises and personal treacheries, but of a profounder, subtler disenchantment, of an awakened sense of life's deception.

We came back from the trenches, the prison camp, the parade ground, radiantly, unspeakably confident. We had looked forward for so long to peace. There had been times when we hardly thought that it would come, certainly not to us. It was like the city of Heaven—a dazzling, remote prospect. We had come to look on it as a tavern where we should rest after our journey; a huge fire would be blazing in the grate, barons of beef would be set before us, mine host would bring from his cellar his richest chambertin. But we had hardly defined the circumstance of our dream. We saw it with the heightened vision of strained and tired nerves as a land of limitless enchantment. And, when peace came, we settled down and waited for the good things to be set before us. And, of course, they were not set before us. And we had not the vitality to fetch them for ourselves; we were tired, not with the exhaustion that follows a day's hard work, from which after sleep we awake the fitter, but with the exhaustion of dissipation, of a sleepless

night. For too long we had been geared too high. The pressure had been maintained by the intoxication of war conditions. We were like tops that are models of poise and balance only as long as they retain their intensity of speed. The stimulation, the incentive had been removed suddenly. We were weak as a drug fiend who has been deprived of morphia; we became listless, lifeless, indifferent.

We have been described as a generation that has flung up the sponge; and the old men grumble about us in their clubs. "No social sense," they say. "A generation that thinks of nothing except tennis and dancing. Poor stuff!" Perhaps: it may be we are the seed that has been flung on stony ground, that has sprung up quickly, without root in itself or sustenance. It may be that the hot sun has scorched and withered us. It may be. But the Victorians indulged in such an orgy of self-righteousness. They proclaimed so loudly that they were leaving the world better than they found it: and we know what manner of inheritance they handed down to us. It may be pardoned in us, I think, our indifference to politics, and the rights and wrongs of little nations.

And yet we all of us, four years ago, came back to life with some sort of an ideal of citizenship; we were conscious of our responsibility to the future. "We would make it," we said, "impossible for there to be ever war again." We were frightfully anxious to do something, but there did not seem anything in particular for us to do. Those of us who wrote, would not have found it difficult perhaps to sell our pens in

the arena of party politics. There were plenty of people ready enough to exploit us. But that was not what we wanted.

During the war many of us had come to look on the Labour party as a sort of fairy godmother. Labour was the only party that had included in its programme a ruthless avoidance of war. And, as the man who is hungry can think only of food, so in 1917 it had seemed to us that the avoidance of war was the one thing that mattered. We expected great things of the *Daily Herald*. But long before the end of 1919 we had realised that no more bellicose production had been ever presented in large quantities to the public. It had substituted one form of war for another. Nations were not to fight each other, but classes were. The proletariat of the world, with the possible exception of the French, was to ride triumphantly over the mangled remains of the idle and blood-sucking rich. It was to be war to the death. Prizes were offered for the best slogan. The people who had clamoured in 1916 for arbitration and compromise between the demands of Germany and those of the Allies, would not listen to arbitration and compromise when the Tynesider demanded another shilling a day from his employer. The *Herald* became the champion of every trade dispute, and some of us began to wonder. Was this international peace, we asked ourselves, worth the purchase at such a price? If it came to a fight, would we rather fight beside English navvies and English ploughmen against the navvies and ploughmen of Germany and Russia; or would we rather fight

beside English, Russian, French, Belgian, German, and Swedish ploughmen against Russian, English, French, German and Swedish aristocrats, or *vice versa*? Of two wars, which was the less pernicious? And we began to think that class is a habit that can be changed in half a generation; a man who is a newsboy at seventeen may be a baronet at fifty and a viscount at seventy; but race is a tree planted deeply in firm soil. We can change our class as easily as we can change our clothes; but English blood is English blood in the pit, in Mayfair, in the shires; and we should have no sympathy with that party that strove to divide a people against itself.

Indeed, we were sick of party politics: we were in search of some league of international co-operation of the young people of Europe, which should have the right to direct our destinies. "It had been our war," we said, "it was going to be our peace." It sounds foolish now, no doubt, at this distant date, but we believed in it then; we were sincere in our desire for it. They offered us "The League of Youth."

It was a magnificent affair that inaugural banquet at the Connaught Rooms. Viscount Bryce and Sir Oliver Lodge were the chief speakers, as far as I remember. And a number of other very venerable persons described themselves, like the old gentleman in the story, as being no older than they felt. I don't think that there were at the high table three people under thirty. And the aims and objects of the League were outlined subsequently in the daily press in an article headed with commendable accuracy, but with a

singular absence of self-criticism, " The Age of Youth." But still we had hopes of it. I found myself vice-president of the Education Committee. One Committee meeting I attended. It was my last.

We assembled to discuss the reformation of the Public Schools. There were eight of us. Four of these were girls, of the Girton-Newnham-1917 Club variety. The other half was composed of a secondary schoolmaster, a journalist, an imponderable young Scot, and myself. The schoolmaster was the president. He knew a good deal about the practical side of the business, and he was, therefore, somewhat sceptical. He opened proceedings with a bland, highly non-committal speech about " harnessing the activities of youth," which was very jolly but got us little " forra-'der." The journalist, who was, in a sense, secretary of the affair, then read some letters from people who had been sufficiently far-seeing to decline the honour to co-operate. Then the Scotsman began his innings : it was a good, breezy innings, of the Walter Brearley-Tom Wass variety ; vigorous, but with the bat infrequently connected with the ball. His idea was to draft manifestoes, circularise headmasters, and open a press campaign on such as declined co-operation. I suggested that headmasters were busy men, that they had secretaries and waste-paper baskets, and that a press campaign on what would be consequently the entire educational world would be a gallant, but unprofitable, undertaking. This perturbed the Scot.

" What, then," he asked me, " are we going to do ? "

"That," I said, "is what I have come here this afternoon to learn."

He emitted a snort of disgust. "But we must do something." And for the first time one of the four flappers spoke: "We've got," she said, "to justify our existence."

That is rather what we were in 1919: a number of persons walking about with a pocket full of stones, wondering which window to smash. In the end we found the stones weighed rather heavily and hurt our thighs and spoilt our clothes, and we dropped them on the pavement. It is easy enough to evolve plans of international brotherhood when the Government feeds and boards and clothes you and gives you some twenty-five pounds pocket-money a month. It is less easy when you have to earn your own living. Questions of international policy seemed less important when the morning post brought a yellow form with scarlet letters across the top: "Third and final application." During the war our liabilities had been those of many million others. In 1919 we entered the glass case of our private lives. We reassumed the habit of our own troubles and our own problems; we became again what Gilbert Frankau describes as the "possessive and predatory male."

X

BUT I doubt even if there had been some employment for it, whether that particular enthusiasm would have survived very long the return to peace conditions. We were only sympathetic to the Communists because their views on the war tallied with our own. We should have soon realised how wide is the divergence between their interests and ours. For Communism is, or so it would seem to me, a sort of insurance policy taken out by the routine worker against the creative worker. The routine worker, the man who knocks nails into the soles of boots, who adds up columns of figures in a ledger, who pushes a trolley up a slope, who does tolerably well a thing that some fifty thousand other people could do equally well if they so chose, is protecting himself against the ingenuity that contrives a machine that will take the place of twenty such as he. He plays for safety. He enters a business as office boy; licks the backs of stamps; he passes into the counting-house and sits on a high stool. He makes no blots in his ledgers, and puts the right invoices in the right envelopes. He is allotted a room to himself and becomes a junior manager. At the age of forty-five he is drawing a salary of £450 a year. At the age of sixty-six he is

given a pension in return for faithful service. He knows his limitations. He accepts and fulfils orders. Of himself he produces nothing. He knows that anyone else could do his job as well as he can. He retains his position through industry and punctuality. He appeals to the humanity of his directors. He hopes in time to fill, in his firm, much the same position as a butler in a baronial establishment. He has weathered many storms. He has become an institution. But because he knows his limitations he is frightened, frightened of the ravages of creative business, the amalgamations of one firm with another firm, the hard, purposeful nature of young blood, of the introduction of new ideas. He knows that, after a certain age, he has no value in the open market. And so he would limit the scope of private enterprise. He would prevent big men from launching schemes whose failure will involve thousands in disaster. The State must supervise and guarantee big business. It must control the avenues of precarious livelihood. It is not envy of the rich that drives the routine worker to Communism. As long as he is paid an adequate and steady wage he does not mind what money his employer makes or loses. But he knows as long as there is big business, as long as tigers hunt and are hunted in the high jungle of finance, so long will markets rise and fall, and so long will there be slumps and crashes and a cutting of staffs and wages; so long will the law of demand and supply be operative. Communism is the armour of the feeble against the adventurous; of safety against daring.

And the artist, more perhaps than anyone, is the soldier of fortune.

He has no armour but his talents and his confidence. He makes his own terms with life. He stands in the open market. And he will stand there whatever party may be in power, whatever changes may alter the surface and the circumstance of life. He belongs to that community which was designated once "as rogues and vagabonds." He is of the bastardy of Feste and Touchstone.

We are entertainers: we who paint pictures, or tell stories, or enact history. And, if we amuse you, you pay us well; and if we fail, you seek elsewhere diversion. Six hundred years ago minstrels and strolling players came by night to the great banqueting hall, and before the leaping fire told their stories and played their play and sang their song. And, if they gave pleasure, there was good food and wine and a roof above them and gold in their purses for the morrow's journey. And if they failed to please there were blows and curses and a night of rain. To-day a novel is printed upon paper, bound in cloth, and scattered over three continents. There are double-column advertisements in the Sunday papers; there are paragraphs and reviews and luncheon parties. There are agents and royalties and contracts. The writing of a story is a trade that provides many thousands of people with employment. But it is only the surface of life that alters, the principle is the same. A man is telling a story: men and women respond to its humour, or its pathos, or its beauty. They pay richly for their entertainment.

But the moment that the story-teller ceases to amuse he is deserted. There are some writers who are pleased to think of themselves as prophets and reformers, who object to the social stigma of their profession. But because they are merchants of hard words they are entertainers none the less. People like to be abused now and then. It is agreeable to sit after a good dinner before a leaping fire, with a decanter of whisky at one's elbow, and read of the approaching overthrow of Israel. The sense of danger titivates the jaded palate. People do not wish always to be wrapped in cotton wool; they like to be frightened, to be "Grand Guignoled" now and then. To be told that their sins are of such blackness gives them a pleasing sense of their own importance. It is a sensation worth the buying.

It would be hardly, I think, too fanciful to draw a parallel between the artist and the courtesan. The real courtesan, I mean; not the poor drabs who trudge by night down Shaftesbury Avenue. One thinks of "Skittles" driving down Hyde Park in the sixties, to hold a levee by the Achilles statue; "Skittles" who broke hearts and homes and fortunes; Skittles who outlived her friends, her beauty, and her generation to die three years ago unremembered. There is more than a slight resemblance between the life of such a one and of the artist. Like her, he has no social status; like her, he is bought and used and flung away. He pleases as she pleases, for a while, through freshness and vitality and novelty; and those that have had their entertainment, feel no after sense of obligation. As long as he so pleases he is granted a wide licence to

flout the conventions with which society has thought it wise to protect itself. Society knows that he is not of her, and she can afford to wait. Everything is forgiven to an " artistic temperament " as long as that temperament is the property of a skilful entertainer. The artist can make what hash he likes of his private life. He can refuse to be accepted without his mistress : and, on the whole, the public prefers its entertainer not to be domesticated like itself. A popular novelist, who had contributed a serial to a Sunday newspaper, was asked to provide the editor with a photograph. He sent a pleasant snap of himself, in his garden, with his wife and children. The snap was returned. " Our readers," the editor said, " would prefer not to think of you as a married man."

Much the same licence is accorded to the courtesan, as long as she is beautiful. She can, if she chooses, be rude to men who ask her for a dance. She can make fun of them in public. She rampages through life in the pride of her youth ; she can pick and choose. Her charm and her beauty are her capital. She makes a bargain with the world of routine and wealth, the world that sells cotton and builds empires, the industrious, unflagging world that asks in its spare time to be amused. To such a one the world says : " Here are two pictures. Make your choice. You may stay all your life a suburban girl. You will go to subscription dances and get kissed furtively in the passage by smarmy, over-dressed young men, who will boast to their companions of your surrender. One of them you will select to take you to a cinema, and, as a pay-

ment, you will allow him to hold your hand. And to one of these young men you will eventually become engaged. You may be very much in love with him, or you may be seeking an escape from the uncongenial surroundings of your home. But in either case the result at the end of three years' time will be the same. The blue bird will have flown away. You will be a mother and a housewife. You will have settled down to the humdrum of suburban matrimony. Your husband will no longer be satisfied with your company in the evening. He will bring in with him those tedious friends of his who were once your dance partners, those tedious friends grown smarmier and softer with the years. And you will sit sewing in a corner while they discuss the political situation and the latest murder case. There will be not a great deal of money. You will be clothed, not dressed. Your prettiness will soon pass, because you will be unable to give it the right setting of georgette and crêpe-de-chine. And you will gaze enviously at the gay windows of Oxford Circus. Before you are thirty, before one of your hairs is grey, your personal life will be at an end. And you will never have lived. You will be safe, that is all. There will be food to eat, a fire to sit before, a roof above you when you have come to the weakening hours of age.

"And this is what we bring you in exchange. We bring you the opportunity of living to their full the best years of your life, eighteen to thirty-three. You will dance night after night at the Savoy. Poiret will design your dresses; you will drive through the London

streets in the deep comfort of a Daimler; you will meet men of the world, brilliant, interesting men: barristers, financiers, doctors, artists. You will live romance. You will love deeply, you will suffer deeply. You will pass from the extreme of happiness to the extreme of pain. You will love no longer than love pleases. You will be the swinging pendulum. You will never rest. You will fulfil yourself."

"And afterwards?"

The world shrugs its shoulders.

"That," it says, "is your concern. You have had those years. It depends on whether you are clever and far-seeing. You may save much money; you may marry; you may become a respectable dowager. Or, with your connection, you may open, very profitably to yourself, a manicure establishment. But that is your affair. If you are wasteful and improvident, life may be very hard to you. That is, we repeat, not part of our bargain. We offer you those fifteen years."

And is that offer so very different from the offer that the world makes the artist? "You have talent," the world says. "We found that first book of yours to a high degree diverting. We are content that you should amuse us for a while if you so choose." And are the alternatives so very different? The future presents no less dark a menace to the novelist. He knows that, sooner or later, he will out-write himself, that the public will get tired of his tricks, that he will cease to be original and they will clamour for something new. If he has saved money during his days of

fortune, or if he has managed to establish himself in some sound commercial concern, in an Editor's chair, or on the board of a publishing house, well and good. But if not, if he has saved no money and is at the end of his resources, he is driven to the equivalent of the courtesan's dreary tramp down Jermyn Street and Piccadilly to hack ill-paid journalism in the columns of the provincial press. And the artist is in exchange offered the same wages. He is offered the opportunity of living to its full the best years of his life. He has money, he is well known. He is not fettered, as his contemporaries are, with office hours. He is free to do what he likes, go where he likes, make love where he likes.

Much has been written of the amours of poets, and novelists, and actors. They have earned a publicity far beyond the range, possibly also beyond the desire, of the financier's. And the artist has been always inclined to attribute the dimensions of his success to his personal magnetism, to his powers of finesse and intuition. But it would be more modest, certainly more generous, in him to return gratitude for the unparalleled opportunities for gallantry with which the circumstances of his life provide him. Far let it be from me to disparage in any way the triumphal progress of certain distinguished and notorious persons. I would merely point out the disadvantages under which their less gifted rivals are conducting operations.

Consider the position of the city man. His daily routine is a matter of general knowledge. In order to carry on his business a great number of people must

know where he is at any given moment to be found. His secretary should even know where he is lunching. If the telephone may be, and it doubtless is, of considerable assistance in the happy ordering of an intrigue, it is of no less service in the detection of it. If a wife rings up her husband in the afternoon and finds him away she begins to wonder. She knows, too, at what hour he leaves his office in the evening. If he is not home half an hour later her wonderment increases. He has either to resort to a lunch in a *cabinet particulier* or he has to manœuvre with endless deception a week-end, or a business trip to Leeds. Every assignation has to be skilfully arranged. There is small scope for the sudden, the unpremeditated moment. It is as machine-made as the hosiery he handles.

But if it is hard to conduct an intrigue, it must be infinitely harder to start one. Even nowadays the majority of women are under some sort of masculine protection ; there is either a husband or a father, or a fiancé or " an uncle." And at the only hours when he himself is free that masculine protection is in operation, a fact that the realistic novelist is in the habit of overlooking. One wonders sometimes how they get started, these affairs of which we read every other day in the evening papers. At haphazard, possibly. Adjacent bedrooms at the end of the passage in a country house. A husband detained in town : a sudden opportunity seized at eagerly—the sort of thing, though, that happens more frequently in literature than in life. Certainly not an accident in the hope of which a conscientious Casanova would be prepared to delay action. Either

that, though, or else a purely business proposition. A lunch at the Carlton grill, and over the liqueur the offer of a flat and five hundred pounds a year. Paul Bourget is reported to have remarked that the only folk worth writing about were those with large incomes; because it was only people without employment who were able to develop themselves naturally, which sounds foolish enough; but as adultery is the invariable background for Latin fiction, it was possibly some such predicament that Bourget had in mind.

Often enough, indeed, a man's love-life is a spectacle to the novelist for melancholy contemplation. In the years that should overbrim with kisses, he has neither the money nor the leisure for much love-making. He is economically and temporally dependent. He indulges in occasional flirtations that he dare not pursue, believing it unfair to make love to a decent girl if he is not in a position to propose marriage to her. Occasionally he buys pleasure in some fourth-floor flat in Piccadilly and feels rather "a dog" about it. He marries when he is thirty-four, and the next three years are the most vital, the most personal he will ever know. Rapture passes; and having once drunken, he would drink again. He begins to sow his wild oats; wild oats must be sown at some time in a man's life, and the casual bartering of sensation is of no significance. But by the time a man is thirty-seven he knows too much and has seen too much to become the light-hearted philanderer he might have been in the earlier twenties. A woman writer—I think it was Rebecca

West—wrote somewhere something to the effect that it was not the bad man, not the philanderer against whom a young girl should be warned. The Jurgens and Casanovas and Macheaths have received so much happiness from women that they repay happiness with happiness. They are the sun that shines and leaves, after its setting, a sense of gratitude. It is against the spiteful man, against the man who has been unsuccessful with women that a young girl should be protected. That is the man who will be unkind to her. And I think it is a bad thing when a man on the verge of middle-age sets out deliberately to sow wild oats. He will be taking revenge somewhere for his starved boyhood. The chance to make the most of the years best worth having is the greatest offer that the world makes to the young artist whom it would turn into an entertainer.

But, even so, I doubt whether this bribe would overcome the instinct of preservation that cautions us to play for safety, were there not that other, that more powerful inducement, the love of one's work for its own sake.

About a year ago there was a symposium in *The Strand* in which a number of novelists were invited to name that book of theirs of which they had most enjoyed the writing. Several writers said that they had not enjoyed writing any of them ; that they had enjoyed the planning, the revision, but that the actual writing was hard and unpleasant work. I wonder. I suppose they were sincere. But I was glad to see the other day in an American paper an article by Hugh

Walpole saying that he continued writing simply because he "loved it—it, telling stories."

Money and leisure and gratified ambition are prettily coloured toys; but they are flavour, they are decoration; there does not come from them the deep, the sustaining satisfaction of a hard task tackled and carried through. It does not matter whether one writes well or badly: there is the same joy of creation, the same pleasure in watching the blank page fill before one's eyes, in counting up the number of words that are the outcome of a morning's work. There is the physical sense of effort; the physical weariness to be fought against, when one's brain is eager with ideas, but one's wrist is stiff and tired—when one longs to drop the pen and sink into an armchair. But one doesn't drop the pen; one goes on, and it is worth it.

It is bowling up hill, against the wind, to keep the runs down while the man at the other end gets wickets. You have bowled ten overs; your legs and arms and back are tired. For sixty balls you have kept that length outside the off stump, just too short to drive, just too far up to cut. You have altered your pace a little; you have bowled first from the far end of the crease; then from close up against the wicket. Little tricks to keep him playing, to break his patience, so that he may make the fatal mistake at the other end against the man with wind and slope to help him. And you are tired. It is heart-breaking, the Fabius Cunctator game. You long to chuck the ball over to the captain, to say, "I'm tired, I can't go on." But you know that he cannot trust his other and better

bowler to keep on at that length ball : you know that the wickets must come from the top end. You stick to it. You bowl another over and you get your second wind.

There is no such thing as work without physical exhaustion, and writing is physically the most exhausting thing I know, far more exhausting than the hardest game of rugger, or the longest day in the field. It is such an emptying of oneself. I tried dictating once, but I did not like it. I got through a terrific lot of work in a very little while. But I did not like it. I missed the sight of the white page slowly turning black, of the rising pile of paper at my side, and the long struggle of the brain against the growing weariness of wrist and fingers.

For, whatever happens, the love of writing stays even with the sorriest of hacks, the man who can afford to write only occasionally the thing he wants to write, who has to produce magazine fiction, and reviews and paragraphs, so that he may buy the leisure in which to write his verses or his unmarketable stories. We stint ourselves in one way so that we may squander ourselves in another. And, here again, we can find an analogy in the courtesan, in the woman who sells part of herself to one man that she may give herself more fully to another. In a love freely given she recovers her self-respect. " What does it matter," she thinks, " what I do as long as I can make that one man happy. And because I allow a few favours to that rich old Jew, I can give to that other what he could have never got from those pink and white, those

simpering, bread-and-butter misses." It is in the same spirit that the purveyor of cheap fiction finances the publication of his verses.

We are of the same race and the same blood, speaking the same language, having no part in the world's business, in what is serviceable to the commercial machinery of life. Even if what we produce is a marketable commodity, even if we bring money into the pockets of publishers and promoters and actor managers, we are still the merchants of entertainment. For a while we have ceased to be rogues and vagabonds. We do not dine, as strolling players did, in the servant's kitchen. We are, for the moment, almost respectable. We belong to clubs. We wear no distinctive dress. It is indeed the fashion for the artist of the day to look perfectly ordinary, to be, in fact, like everyone else, with short hair and servant problems. To-day Congreve would be content to style himself a dramatist and be a member of the Garrick Club. It is a phase. It is only the surface of life that alters. Another turn of the wheel and the artist will return to his own people. And he will stroll from one town to another, with minstrels and actors and courtesans, a merry, careless company, vagabonds of fortune, useless and ornamental. And once more, perhaps, there will be real play-acting and English singing and a-telling of simple tales.

XI

THERE is an idea that story-telling is a cheap and vulgar thing; that it fulfils no function; that it does not enlarge our knowledge of human character and human life. And yet who is the more distinct to us, Michael Fane or Sir Launcelot, Guinevere or Sylvia Scarlett? The character of Michael Fane has been presented to us through many thousand words of detailed analysis. Sir Launcelot is the hero of a few incidents. But we know Launcelot better than we know Michael, for all his many volumes. And do we know Jean Christophe as well as we know Saul and Joab and the son of Jesse? There are fifteen hundred pages of Jean Christophe, fifteen hundred pages of turmoil and conflict and desire; in retrospect a confused impression. But we never forget the Sabine incident, that perfect story, that diamond in a copper ring. The outline blurs; one character merges into another. But there remains the picture of Sabine sitting listlessly before her house; of Sabine pulling down the blind across the window on the night when she realises that Jean loves her; of Sabine shelling peas; of Sabine searching for a button in the disorder of her shop; of Jean and Sabine shivering on either side of the door afraid to turn the handle. Forty

pages out of fifteen hundred, but the most perfect in the prose literature of the last forty years.

Turgenev never organised his thought as Tolstoi did. He did not explain himself in constructive argument. He had no need. There is implicit in his work, the most gentle, the most tolerant, the most harmonious philosophy that has been expounded by man since the Sermon on the Mount. And Turgenev was a story-teller. He knew that no language speaks more directly to the human heart than that of simple narrative. The Russians hated and distrusted him, especially Dostoieffsky, who could never forgive Turgenev for being a gentleman. But there has never been anyone less a snob, intrinsically, than Turgenev, no one who has stood more simply, less assumingly by his achievements. He was content to be an artist, a maker of beautiful things. He did not, as Tolstoi did, assume the rôle of prophet. "If story-telling is a cheap thing," we can imagine him to say, "I cannot help it. It is the thing that I was born to do."

Turgenev knew that it was enough to create beauty: that it is unprofitable folly to ask a direct influence of art; that it is for the politician and the journalist, not the artist, to alter the social fabric. Turgenev was an entertainer; nothing more, and nothing less. To-day the artist has developed a sense of mission. He feels that he is here to get something done. And is in danger, consequently, of exchanging a temporal for an eternal view of life. We have come through our familiarity with the daily press to associate the written word with the statement of a case.

When we read a newspaper article on the conditions of life in Bermondsey our first question is : " That is all very well. But is it thus that the majority of people in Bermondsey exist ? " And when we read a novel about Bermondsey we apply the same standard. " Is this," we ask ourselves, " how the majority of Bermondsians live ? " If we decide that it is not, we say that the novel "is not true to life." We find it hard to rid ourselves of the idea that all writing must be a form of special reporting.

And, of course, for the purposes of a novel it does not in the least matter whether the lives of the majority of Bermondsians do, or do not, correspond with those of the hero and the heroine. Universality is not obtained by cataloguing the routine of a number of uninteresting persons. It is unlikely that many dairy-maids have been the victims of such a disconcerting series of adventures as befell Tess of the D'Urbevilles. But Tess is true to life. It is true to life because Thomas Hardy is a novelist and not a journalist. If he had intended his book to be an " Uncle Tom's Cabin," if his creative impulse had been inspired by a wish to improve the lot of the Wessex farm-hand, the critics would have been justified in saying : " This is a piece of special pleading based on a particularly unusual combination of circumstances. We therefore consider it to be untrue to life." For the journalist the word " life " implies the external conditions under which the majority of people live ; for the artist, life is the reality behind livelihood, and for the revelation of that reality the choice of subject is comparatively

unimportant. The same moment of reality may be presented equally effectively through the most diverse mediums.

The appreciation of the temporal quality of life, of the approach of age, the sense of weakening power, is found in the work of nearly all great writers ; but it is expressed by each writer in terms of the phenomena with which he is most familiar. Anthony Trollope would find relief from such a mood in the study of a kindly, ineffectual parson. George Moore would tell the story of some butterfly of the Nouvelle Athène, some Marie Pellegrin. Neville Cardus would recall the fleeting splendour of Tom Richardson. To the journalist there would seem little in common between these three studies. But the artist would see that the subject was in each case the same. In " La Terre," Zola told the same story that Shakespeare told in "Lear."

It is only the best sellers nowadays who are writing stories, really writing stories, stories for their own sakes. That is why they are best sellers. They may be bad stories that they are telling, or rather they may be telling the stories badly. For there is no such thing as a new story—it is the treatment that is all-important. But they are stories ; and most of their authors, if they chose, if they thought it worth the doing, could write the sort of novel with three hundred readers that would get half a column of serious consideration in the cultured weeklies.

Berta Ruck, for instance. I do not know if her books are ever reviewed in the sixpenny weeklies; I should be inclined to doubt it. But I have not the

slightest doubt that her books are a great deal better than the majority of novels that are so honoured. She writes very jolly stories about very jolly people. They begin with a highly improbable situation. A woman persuades a man to become her husband in name so that she can attend to her business unbothered by the attentions of a crowd of suitors. A financier, to pacify his match-making parents, engages a secretary to act as his official fiancée. A girl dresses up as a boy and becomes a chauffeur. Highly improbable occurrences, undoubtedly. But it is permissible to open on a situation of any degree of improbability, provided the characters subsequently behave according to rule. And Berta Ruck's characters do. They are real people. And what is more important, they are very jolly people. One has a genuine affection for them, which is more than one can say of most modern novels. How often do we come across a hero and a heroine that we really like, that we really want to see in the last chapter happily married to the right person ? We do in a Berta Ruck novel, and we will pardon any stretching of coincidence if it allows that fortunate encounter on the last page. To be able to do that, to be able to write a jolly book about jolly people is very much more worth while than . . . But we will be neither personal nor malicious. Let us be content to state that it would be certainly more charitable, and probably more accurate to assume that a book sells on account of its qualities rather than its defects.

One envies, sometimes, the people who were born a hundred years ago. It must have been so easy to

write then, when all the plots were new and there were so few writers. To-day everyone is writing novels. One is cultivating a soil that has yielded many harvests. One begins a story: for a week, a month, a fortnight one is happy and excited, and then one loses interest suddenly. It is *vieux jeu*, one says. It has all been done so many times before. One is not good enough to make an old thing new. Or, again, it may be that one can find no ending to a story, an ending that has not become banal through other people's exploitation of it. This, for instance, this scene in a Soho restaurant: a small, unobtrusive, unsensational, but very excellent foreign restaurant in Dean Street, where I used to dine occasionally, in days when I had a bungalow beneath the Downs, after a day's football, before the last train down to Sussex, when I was tired, when I did not want to be disturbed by music and noise and laughter, when I wanted my eyes to rest on quiet wallpaper and quiet dresses, when I knew exactly what I wanted, and exactly where to find it; there: this one dramatic episode of which it has been my fortune to be a witness.

I had only just taken my seat and begun my examination of the menu when the double-doors of the restaurant swung open and a young girl paused there in the doorway, looking round her with the expression of perplexed embarrassment that the faces of young people assume in a strange place. She made a pretty picture as she stood there, a fur cap fitting tightly over the head, pressing the brown hair into a thick wave about her ears; a small hand raised towards

the throat, keeping in its place the woollen scarf that was flung across the shoulder; a slim ankle protruding beneath her skirt, a "tweazy" looking little thing; and if her features were not beautiful, she had the prettiness of all young girls whose figures are slim and graceful—the charm of the green leaf and the bud, that fascinates a man more than beauty does, but that passes quickly and lasts rarely into womanhood.

She stood there, looking round her for a moment, then the perplexed expression left her; she smiled and walked down the centre of the room.

A man rose from a table in the corner and came to meet her. He was one of those men whom it is almost impossible to describe, so much did he resemble the rest of his sex in his dress, his manner, and the general carriage of his person. He looked, and probably was, a gentleman; he was about thirty years old; he had a small dark moustache, and he showed no signs of baldness. Beyond that I could tell nothing. He was hidden in complete security behind the technique of an upbringing.

I could not hear how they greeted each other, but in the way in which he helped her off with her coat there was implied, I fancied, a suggestion of uneasiness. "They do not know each other very well," I said to myself, and, moving my chair a little further to the right, I arranged myself so that I should be able to watch them without turning my head.

The suggestion of uneasiness was repeated as he leaned over the table towards her with the menu. "He is a little too eager," I told myself. "He is

anxious to make a success of it, and he is overacting. He is confoundedly uncomfortable." And, calling the waiter, I ordered a dish of which the preparation would take, I knew, a good twenty minutes—and settled myself to enjoy the little comedy.

He had ordered an expensive dinner—champagne, a fried sole, a pheasant and a Japanese salad, and a mushroom savoury. He was desperately anxious to make it a success, and, to avoid awkward pauses, he was talking most of the time: amusingly, too, I gathered, for she often smiled at what he said, and once she burst out laughing—fresh, clear laughter; and that laugh, which came about half-way through the meal, revealed to me what indeed I should have seen before, that, while he was enduring agonies of self-consciousness, she was solely concerned with the natural enjoyment of a good dinner in pleasant company. "The plot thickens," I said, for this discovery ruled out the possibility of the pleasant little romance I had been considering—their parents had forbidden their marriage, they had decided to run away feeling very brave when the scheme was only under discussion, but now that the moment had come they repented the splendid resolution and would give anything to be in their respective homes sitting before the fire, thinking pleasantly of bed. That solution would have to go; for, if this was the case, she would certainly be as nervous, and probably more nervous, than he, unless—but that was a contingency of which I refused to consider the possibility. The elopement idea would have to go, and, besides, there was not the least

suggestion that they were lovers ; they had not once looked into each other's eyes ; they had not been even silent together, and silence is the beginning of love. They were not man and wife ; they were not avowed lovers ; they did not even seem to be potential lovers.

And yet this dinner was for him certainly a big occasion. She meant something to him. But what ? It was possible, of course, that he was in love with her, and not she with him. But that was no cause for shyness. Courtship is a leisured and, on the whole, pleasant business ; and surely the young man was not so foolish as to be contemplating a premature proposal on the way home. For there is nothing more fatal than a hurried courtship. A moment comes when a girl expects a man to take her by the hand and tell her that he loves her, and would be angry with him if he did not. But it is disastrous to anticipate a climax. And this the young man knows ; being a man of thirty such moments must have often come to him before. " And yet, perhaps," I said to myself, " he is contemplating this folly. Why ? "

And, putting down my glass, I began to frame a story. He had been an officer in the war, and after demobilisation had gone up to Oxford to take his degree. That was quite possible, and would make him twenty-eight years old to-day. Yes, he had gone up to Oxford, and had decided to go in for the Civil Service ; he had wanted a post in the Home Civil, but he had not been able to make up for the years he had lost during the war, and he had passed into the Indian

Civil. In a fortnight he would go abroad for several years, and there was this girl whom he had met perhaps at tennis, and with whom he had fallen in love, fascinated by her delicacy, her frail grace, her suggestion of the butterfly. She was young and inexperienced, and had regarded his love as comradeship, for he was undemonstrative, and talked about dancing and the cricket championship; and now he was going away. He had asked her out to dinner, and was desperately anxious to bring things to a head before he went. And of all this she knew nothing.

An interesting situation that could be developed into a good story. In the man's failure to pass into the Home Civil Service there would be just a hint of the sad position of the ex-soldier; he had served, and had been passed over in favour of someone who had not. And on this failure hung the significance of his romance. He had prepared himself for a slow, quiet courtship, and now found that he had to compress into a few days the campaign of several months—and, of course, he had not been able to. He was not the man to capture a young girl's heart by storm. If he succeeded in making her fall in love with him, it would be only after many weeks of growing intimacy. She would begin by confiding in him—that would be the first step; and then—but it would be a slow business, and, at any rate, it was impossible now. In three days he would have to go to India.

It was really a capital story, and I began to plan it out: the meeting at a tennis tournament; the news of his failure at the exam.; the dinner party in the

restaurant; and then the journey home in the taxi. I could see it so clearly.

They would sit in silence for a while. Then he would lean forward and whisper her name, and she would turn her head and look at him with surprise.

"Yes," she would say.

And he would not know what to do in the unaccustomed situation; and, as he had over-acted in the restaurant to hide his nervousness, so would he overact now. Without any warning he would take her in his arms and kiss her awkwardly and say: "I love you." It would be a horrible failure. Very likely it would be her first kiss, and she would have her own romantic conception of what a first kiss should be, and she would be angry with him for his clumsiness. The kiss will have given her no pleasure, and that she cannot forgive him. She will push him from her, will probably say: "Now you've spoilt it all," for at these moments it is the ridiculous that occurs to us, and she would speak out of her recollection of book and magazine heroines, and he would try and explain, but she would shake her head angrily.

"Leave me alone! Leave me alone! Can't you see that you've spoilt everything?"

And, when they reached her home, she would jump out of the taxi and run straight up the steps without turning to say good-bye to him, and he would sit back in the cushions reflecting dismally that in three days he would sail for India, and would not see her again for three—perhaps four—years.

A good story! I would sit down to write it as soon

as I got home, not waiting for the morning to blur my impression of her startled girlhood. And I should not find it difficult to end this story. While he was away he would write to her and ask forgiveness, protesting that he loved her, had always loved her, that he was sorry for his rudeness ; and that, when he came back, might he hope—a trite letter it would be ; but then, if it were anything but trite, he would be a writer of much talent, and that I did not propose to make him. No ; he would write her an ordinary love-letter, and she, being an ordinary woman, would be moved by it, and, with the distance hiding her blushes, she would write, saying that she had been young and foolish, but was now wise, and would gladly wait for him. And during four years they would create slowly, letter by letter, an illusion of each other out of the enchantment of things remote. He would become her Prince Charming, and she would be for him a creature of infinite fragrance. And then, when they met again, she would find herself in the arms of a prosaic Anglo-Indian, with thinning hair, and he would find that a girl had become a woman, that her pretty features had grown petulant during the years of waiting.

And in the morning I should have to decide whether or not they should marry ; probably they would, from a lack of the courage that looks at itself in the glass and says : "You have failed, my friend." Yes, it would be truer to make them marry, and perhaps she might be happy in her children, while he found pleasure in the society of another woman. But, at any rate, a dream would have been passed, and that would be the

object of my story: to tell simply how everything changes, everything passes; not a new philosophy and one that occurred to Heraclitus, but true nevertheless.

And looking across at the couple in the corner, I thought with real sympathy on their sad fate. They were just getting ready to go; the waiter had brought the bill neatly folded upon a plate; the girl had turned towards a large photograph of the Royal Family, and was endeavouring to arrange her hair from the blurred reflection in it.

She was smiling and happy, ignorant of the disaster that awaited her. Within five minutes she would have been embraced clumsily, would have assured her lover that "he had spoiled everything," and the curtain would have descended on the first act of the tragedy. Could nothing be done to save her; it was cruel—so young, so fresh and with so brief a springtime.

I was indulging myself in this soft, sentimental reverie, for a story-teller always runs in great danger of confusing his own reality with that of the world, and of regarding everything that happens to himself and to his friends as chapter headings in a novel. I was just, I say, indulging my pet weakness to the top of my bent when suddenly, for the first time in my life, I was the witness of a real dramatic incident.

The girl had turned to arrange her hair in the blurred reflection of the sheet of glass that protected the Royal Family from dust, and, in order to brush a little powder from her chin, she had taken her pocket-handkerchief from her bag. The bag lay open on the table, its mouth pointing to her companion, and, to my amaze-

ment, I saw the man lean forward, glance round the room to see if anyone was looking, and then quickly take from the bag a couple of pound notes ; these he placed on the plate under the bill, added another note of his own, and called the waiter's attention to the plate. Then, a minute later, the plate returned ; the waiter received a substantial tip, in return for which he helped his clients on with their coats and bowed them out of the restaurant ; all of which I watched in dazed, though intrigued, wonderment. I suppose I ought to have risen from my seat and called the girl's attention to the theft, but it is hard for one who has chosen for himself the rôle of onlooker to decide on violent and sudden action. And besides, I have learnt that interference is invariably unwise, that I cannot expect other people to mind their own business until I mind mine. At any rate, whatever was the right thing to do, I did what it was natural for me to do under such circumstances : I sat where I was, and in five minutes became lost in a vague and wistful speculation.

The reasons for the man's embarrassment were now clear ; all the evening he had been waiting his opportunity to steal his companion's money—that much was obvious. And to think that for half an hour I had been concocting an absurd story after the manner of Turgenev, about an Indian Civil Servant and " the girl he left behind him " ! Impatiently I called for my bill, tipped the waiter, and walked out into Dean Street.

The cool air did me good in restoring my self-confidence. It was a mistake, I told myself, that

anyone might have made. We do not expect to meet thieves outside the Stock Exchange and the pages of the police reports. And it was quite a good story that I had invented—a slight debt to Turgenev perhaps, but then every short story that is written owes something either to Turgenev or de Maupassant or Tchecov. And I had, besides, the material for another really first-class tale. I could see it so clearly: the young girl prattling away pleasantly and the man getting more and more worried. "Will she never powder her nose?" he asks himself, and tries to hide his anxiousness beneath a series of amusing anecdotes. And no doubt I could make them discuss the modern girl, and she will say that she hates the girl who powders and paints; and he will have to agree with her, seeing that her complexion is her own, although he is, for the first time in his life, hating the fresh bloom of her cheek and praying that she were another sort of girl—a delightful situation. And then, at last, when all seems lost, I could make her lean forward to smell the flowers on the table, and a speck of yellow pollen would attach itself to her chin, to which he would, of course, call her attention.

"Is there really," she would say, and, opening her bag, she would take out her handkerchief, turn to the photograph beside them, and give him his opportunity.

Up to that point it would be quite simple. But beyond it a lot of thought would be required. So good a motive must not be flung away, and all the way down the Charing Cross Road I turned the incident over in my mind.

Fifteen years ago I could have made him an agent in the White Slave Traffic. It was a popular theme then ; every young girl who came up to London looked round at Paddington apprehensively for the kindly old lady who would ask her if she was new to these parts. Yes, fifteen years ago it would have been a moving story. But, during the last fifteen years, Villiers Street has become placarded with shilling descriptions of " Why Girls Go Wrong " ; and the Bishop of London has written a great many prefaces and preached a great many sermons. The White Slave Traffic is *vieux jeu.* Still, there was something in the seduction *motif.* " Yes, certainly," I said to myself, as I presented my season-ticket at the barrier at Victoria and walked down the platform in search of a corner-seat ; something might be made out of it : and by the time we had reached Selhurst a story had begun to form itself in my mind.

She had come up from the provinces for the day, and had met an old friend of hers who had asked her out to dinner ; she had intended to catch the last train home. The man is smitten by her beauty and wonders how he can best possess it. Should he steal her money she will be unable to buy a ticket back.

The picture grew before me. I could see them at the booking-office. I could see her fumbling in her bag, searching every pocket, and then turning to him with a despairing look.

" I've lost the money."

" Oh, no ; surely not," he would say. " It must be in one of your pockets. Have another look."

And she would make another long, careful search which would, of course, be equally vain. And she would turn to him with tear-filled eyes.

"But what am I to do? I can't get home. I haven't any money to buy a ticket."

And in her voice would be the suggestion that he should lend her some, and, of course, he would say that he had none with him, but that if she would come back to his flat. . . . And she would thank him effusively and they would leap into a taxi, but when they arrived at the flat, which would be at the top of four flights of stairs, with the flat below unoccupied, he would discover that he had no money after all, and that the porter had gone, and that there was no one from whom he could borrow any; she would sink down on the sofa, her hands clasped before her knees, while he stood behind her wondering at what exact point——

But at that moment the train stopped at East Croydon, where I had to change and wait twenty minutes for a connection; and, while I stamped up and down the platform trying to keep warm, a swift dissatisfaction with my story overcame me. What did it matter what he said next, or at what exact point he . . . for whatever he did, or whatever she did, the story as I had elected to tell it could only end in one way—a row of dots, and a short concluding paragraph: "Next morning, her dark hair scattered across the pillow, she woke in a strange room. . . ." And how often that has been done. In how many novels has not that dark hair been scattered across

that pillow? It was theatrical, vulgar, the sort of plot that occurs to one as one sits in the smoking-room of one's club after a heavy lunch and half a bottle of Pommard, and I walked up and down the platform of East Croydon station in a state of cold and miserable self-contempt.

But warmth revives us, and when I was again in the corner-seat of a smoker, down the window of which the heat ran in long, straggly trickles, I began to think that, after all, though I had to wash out the seduction motive, there might be something in the idea of the lost return-ticket, and the last train to Anerley. Suppose now that the young man had for a long time besieged unsuccessfully his fair companion, and that on the refusal of his third proposal he had decided that he would never secure the hand of his beloved unless he managed to compromise innocently her honour?

Yes, that might work out. He would steal her money at the restaurant; they would reach the booking-office where the scene which I have already described would be enacted. There would be the return to the flat and the discovery that the porter was out, and that, after all, he had forgotten to cash the cheque he had written out that morning.

"But what am I to do?" she would say.

And, with well-simulated confusion, he would mutter something about not minding a "shake-down" on the sofa, and that if she would take his room . . .

"Oh, but I couldn't! How could I? What would mother say?"

Just a little touch that would place the mother at

once before the reader's eye—a plump, heavy woman with a small, unsatisfactory husband. A woman of strong passions, that have focussed themselves on a rigid observance of the proprieties.

"But what else are you to do?" the young man would exclaim, and he would stammer something about giving her his key. And, in the end, she would consent to pass the night there, and next morning they would arrive at Anerley together with the milk, and be received by the mother in the front-parlour, a cold, melancholy room with the fire smoking dismally. She would receive them with her hands on her hips, and she would say one word, "Well!" and then listen while the young man stammered his explanations. Of course she would not believe him: he had never expected her to, and would have been miserably disappointed if she had. He would listen to her threats and tirades, and then, at the right moment, he would draw himself up to his full height.

"Madam," he would say, "your accusations are untrue; the door of the room in which your daughter slept was locked all night. I slept on the sofa. But to prove my honour, and to vindicate hers, I am prepared—and shall be proud—to marry your daughter."

A slow smile would spread across the mother's face. Honour saved, a daughter off her hands; and at last the daughter, moved by his chivalry, might even fall in love with her knight-errant.

I considered this solution during the two miles' walk from Hassocks station. It was original. I had never

seen it done before. Such a situation is common enough in modern fiction. But the mistake is usually genuine, and that scene in the dismal parlour is the prelude to long years of married misery. Occasionally the affair is arranged by the girl, if she can trust her lover's lack of enterprise. For a girl is more interested in marriage than a man, and proposes it indirectly more often than the admirers of the strong man would have us think. But for a man to plan such an escapade —that would indeed be new. And I went to sleep contented, thinking that the next day would pass pleasantly in congenial work.

But there is a poem by a poetess, now little read, which contains the lines :

> " Colours seen by candlelight
> Do not look the same by day,"

and when the sun shone next morning through my bedroom window my plot seemed less original than I had thought it the night before. What was it, after all, but a conceit ? It said " black " to someone else's " white " ; it turned an old coat inside out, and though it would no doubt cause surprise if I were to walk down the village with my coat inside out, it would not be a particularly original act, and it would be the same coat.

That is not the way to make a good story—to tack an old situation on to a new one. I should have to find a different ending somehow ; it was no good setting out to write it yet. For want of anything better to do, I walked out and began to weed the garden. But though I weeded the flower-beds in front of the house,

and did valiant work with a hoe among the cabbages, no idea had come to me by lunch-time. And, though I spent the whole afternoon before a jigsaw puzzle, the most restful of all pursuits, tea-time found my mind a blank, and in this state it remained until a friend, to whom I had related the incident, made a most pertinent remark :

" Why, if the girl could see her face reflected in the photograph, did she not see the young man take the money from her purse ? "

I sat in surprised silence. Why had I not thought of that before ?

" Yes," I said, " but if she saw, why didn't she say something ? "

" That's for you to find out."

And for the next three days I searched my mind for reasons for her silence.

At last I began to see the glimmerings of a tale, the fifth that I had constructed about this romantic couple. And this is what I saw : a shy young man from the provinces comes up to London with an introduction to some wealthy friends. There is a daughter whom he thinks very beautiful, and with whom he thinks that he might in a short while find himself in love. And he suggests very timidly that it would be nice if she would show him " round the sights," for he wants to see London, and has no other friends in it. And, as these wealthy people have advanced views, or perhaps because the daughter has succeeded in impressing her views upon her parents, his suggestion is accepted ; the result is a lunch at the Criterion, a theatre, and tea

afterwards. As they seem to be getting on rather well together, he suggests a dinner-party. He would like to see Soho.

"Oh, but I must go back and ask mother first," she says.

"Really?"

"Of course; it's very nice of her to let me out at all. I must go back and ask her."

And he admires this sense of duty, which is probably only an excuse for a change of frock. And so she returns home to tell her mother how well everything is going, while he goes to the little Soho restaurant to engage a table; and then, while he is waiting for her, he makes a horrible discovery. He has only a pound left; what is he to do? He picks up the menu, and sees that it will be impossible for him to dine in anything like the way he wishes for less than thirty shillings. He is a stranger; the restaurant will not give him credit. There is no one to whom he can go to for a loan; he cannot ask the girl, on their first day together, to lend him money. And so, all through the dinner there hangs over his head the menace of that piece of folded paper. What will happen to him? He remembers seeing once in Manchester the proprietor pitch an impecunious client headlong into the street. They could hardly do that to him. He would be too big, but he will be disgraced in the girl's eyes. He has not the presence to carry off such a scene with honour. He will stammer and mumble, and try to explain, and look foolish; probably in the end he will leave his watch in bail, while the

girl will stand by him, ashamed of him and contemptuous.

He tries to make the meal last as long as possible; they have coffee and two liqueurs and endless cigarettes; but the moment comes at last when she begins to button on her gloves and collect her things.

"I really must go now," she says, "and it has been such a lovely evening. Thank you so much."

And he looks in misery at the piece of folded paper. Then, just as he is preparing to signal to the waiter and ask for an interview with the patron, the temptation comes: her bag lies open facing him; she is looking the other way. He sees money. Here is the way out; perhaps she will not notice that she has lost it. She is rich. At any rate, he must run the risk. And, as she tidies her hair in the glass, she sees him take her money.

She is shocked, terribly shocked, but it is easy to understand her silence; her curiosity is whetted, she is interested in the young man, and guesses that one day it may very well be that she will feel more than interest for him. Money is of no great concern to her.

Yes, I could see the scene clearly enough; it would provide me with excellent opportunities for dramatic dialogue; the growing uneasiness of the man with the girl's gradual appreciation of it and wonder at the cause of it, the hope, perhaps, that it is the beginning of love. A good scene, but it would be impossible not to write a good scene with such a setting and such an episode. But, even as I saw it, I knew that it would be no good. To what climax would it work: to nothing

but the old *cliché*—" I knew it all along." It would be kept as a surprise, of course ; the reader would not be told that the girl had seen the theft reflected in the looking-glass. The story would describe the progress of their courtship ; the heart-searchings of the young man. " If I tell her, will she despise me ? " How the machinery would creak, how often it has been done before ; and at last the stage would be set for the confession.

" I have something terrible to tell you, dear."

He would blurt it out and then hide his face in her lap for shame, and she would stroke his hair softly and smile.

" Silly old dear," she would say. " I knew it all along ! "

How trite it would be, how banal ! And the fact that it might be very likely true would not in any way redeem it. We are plagiarists in life as we are in books, and there are certain motives that are now impossible in a story, although they occur in life. They have been used too often. What a weariness overcomes us when we discover in a novel of matrimonial dispute that the wife is about to become a mother, and that in consequence the hero cannot run off with his secretary.

No doubt it is an affair of frequent occurrence ; impending maternity frustrates an impending honeymoon. Autumn lays waste the spring. But no self-respecting novelist would allow " the little stranger " to extricate him from a difficulty. And, in the same way, no self-respecting novelist would allow a heroine " to know it

all along." It is a motive that has served its purpose well enough in its time, but when a coin has passed through many hands the signs and figures on it are worn away ; it is valueless and is returned to the Mint ; which is the proper place for " the little stranger " and " I knew it all along."

And now, having attempted five different stories, all of them unsatisfactory, I know that it is my duty to provide a conclusion that shall be unexpected and that shall ridicule my previous conjectures. I know that I ought to meet in the restaurant at a later date the hero or heroine, or both of them together, and learn from them the true story ; there should be—I know it—a punch in the last paragraph ; but that is exactly what I cannot give, for I do not know the real end of the story and have been unable to invent one. Unsatisfactory, perhaps, but intriguing all the same. In a world where so much is ordered by the inviolable laws of mathematics, it is pleasant to find something that is truly incomplete. For the first time in my life I was the witness of a dramatic episode, the sort of thing that one would not see again in a thousand years. It was a fragment in the lives of two people, and it must remain a fragment, a baffling, fascinating fragment. And, on the whole, I am glad to have it so. Such another moment will never come to me. When the voice of the lecturer begins to fade, when the sun beats down upon the mound at Lord's and the cricket becomes slow : at all times when the mind detaches itself from its surroundings I shall return in my imagination to that evening in the restaurant. It will be a

treasure for all time, a book in which I shall read for ever without weariness. Perhaps one day I shall hit upon the meaning of it; but I hope not. I prefer to keep it an enigma, to be able to shut my eyes and watch the growing embarrassment of a young man who is planning an unnatural theft, to see a young girl stand in the doorway of a restaurant, a fur cap fitting tightly over her head, a gloved hand raised across her throat.

XII

CERTAIN motives, I said, after a while get written out, and must be sent like coins for renewal to the mint. And so of a particular technique, of certain ways of narrative, the chronicle novel for example. In 1911 everyone was telling the story of a generation's passage through youth to middle age; it had become the fashionable medium for social satire; it seemed the destined channel for the main stream of early twentieth-century narrative. But already a dam has been placed across its path, the dam of the years 1914-1918.

The novel reader, I suppose, knows no greater weariness, no sensation of more profound misgiving than that which comes over him when he realises on page 173 that the action of the story is about to land him in the year 1913. He loses interest immediately. What does it matter, he asks himself, whether Jane becomes engaged to that rascal Harry, or Arthur elopes with the designing Marjorie? August 1914 is coming, and from whatever manner of fix into which, between now and then, they may contrive to place themselves the author will have no difficulty in extricating them. The reader feels that he has been deceived. He has no use for the *deus ex machinâ*. He feels as the small

boy did who flung the *Iliad* in disgust across the room, and exclaimed : " Rotten ! they never had a fair fight once. There was always a god on one side or another."

The war, in the average novel, is an effect without a cause. It is unquestionable that a great many homes were absolutely turned inside out by " the great interruption." There is no doubt that a great many difficulties were removed by this heaven-sent intervention, even as a great many simple situations were made interminably complex. All over the world there was effect without a cause, but in the novel, which is an essentially artificial thing, a thing that one makes with one's own hands, there can be no effect without cause. And the conscientious novelist gazes in dismay at this tear across the fabric of life. He can, of course, start his story earlier ; but there can be no real conclusion to a chronicle novel that ends in 1910. The reader knows that, in four years' time, the happy home on which the curtain has so tenderly descended will be in chaos and that the hero will have to set out again on his travels. He can hardly begin it in December 1918 with the picture of a young man walking out of his tailor's, in a grey tweed suit. A chronicle novel can barely get started in five years. And it is equally difficult for a writer to take the war in his stride. There have been one or two attempts ; but, with the exception of " The Forsyte Saga," they have been failures. For that type of novel one wants a clear ten years on either side.

Or it may be that the generating force of the movement is already spent ; it may be that the reader has

grown indifferent through repetition to the fortunes of the shy, sensitive young man who retired into a corner and read Keats while his companions were playing football, and to whom one of the masters would deliver himself of some such portentous prophecy as : " You are not for the middle way. You will rise or you will sink. The stars for you, or the depths." And there was certainly a singular similarity about that young man's early amatory adventures ; the wanton with the heart of gold ; the pure girl and the unhappy marriage ; the splendid heroism of infidelity. It seemed very daring and original in 1912 to end a novel with a divorce instead of with a marriage. But was such an end any more conclusive than the Victorian wedding bells ? In the Victorian novel the young man gets engaged to the wrong girl, but meets the right girl in time to marry her. In the Georgian novel the marriage to the right girl is preceded by a divorce, instead of a broken engagement.

Fashions pass quickly nowadays, there are so many novels and so many novelists. One man starts a movement ; a whole host of lesser writers follow him, prejudicing him with their imitations. This romantic movement of Michael Sadleir's : ten years at the most I give it. " Desolate Splendour " is a good book, but it is the forerunner inevitably of a positive cavalcade of melodramatic barons and pornographic duchesses. As a publisher's reader I shiver to think of the fare with which these next few summers will provision me.

We have too many books : that is the whole trouble. And it is not from the commercial point of view

that I am complaining. I am not saying the supply is greater than the demand. It isn't. The number of novelists has increased, but so has the reading public. Commercially the writer has a pretty good time of it nowadays. The big men, Wells and Galsworthy and Bennett, must have made more money out of writing than Dickens and Thackeray ever did: and we others, life is materially easier for us than it was probably for our brothers of the 1820's. At any rate, I know no other profession in which a man of twenty-five can afford to play cricket three whole days of a working week. It is not on the commercial side I am grumbling. What I am trying to say is this: that it is harder to-day for a writer to produce good work now than it has ever been before.

The pace is too fast for one thing. A novel a year. "You must keep your name before a public." That is what agent and publisher are continually dinning into the author's mind, and it is true, of course. That is the commercial line. Spring and autumn fashions. And only a few can last. A novel a year would be no hardship to a man endowed with the ebullient vitality of a Dickens or a Balzac; but there are not many such. In five novels and a few short stories Flaubert said all he had to say. Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, and Richardson together, they do little more than reach double figures. Maupassant had written himself out at forty-three.

And then because there are so many novelists, each writer is expected to cultivate a particular province. His name on a book is like the label on a bottle of wine. "Ah, yes," says the library subscriber, "Compton

Mackenzie, a story of sound and colour; a little naughty: many alluring ladies; a smooth, ornate, sentimental style." Should he discover instead a grey, political study of the effect of Trade Unionism on the commercial prosperity of the Tynemouth, he would be as disappointed, and would consider himself as ill-used, as Professor Saintsbury would if the Chateau Margaux he was offering his guests should reveal itself as Clos de Vougeot. An admirable Burgundy, but he had ordered claret. The novelist is not encouraged to make experiments. He is asked to rewrite one book indefinitely, till the material is watered down and a new entertainer has appeared.

And there have been so many novels. Every obvious situation has been used. The simple themes of love, jealousy, parenthood have been exploited till there is little new to say. The broad field has been ploughed so often. There are only a few dark spots by the hedge, under the shadow of the trees, where there is little sunshine and plants grow weakly, crookedly, different from their fellows, dank places where the few may specialise. "This, at least," they say, "we can make our own."

And whatever else may be urged against *Ulysses* no one could deny it is James Joyce's own. An amazing work. A book without grammar and without coherence; like a boat that is launched from an aeroplane in mid-ocean, without oars, without rudder, and without sails. Sometimes I see *Ulysses* as a literary Thermopylae, a desperate stand against insuperable odds. "I will transcribe life," he said, "as it is. I will omit nothing.

Everything that passes through the mind shall be set on record. By setting everything down I shall achieve proportion." *Ulysses* is, perhaps, the most splendid failure in literature. But it is a failure. And when I hear ecstatic praise of it, I remember the five weeks or so during which I was the slave of jigsaw puzzles. For six hours a day I worked at them. I assorted and reassorted ridiculous pieces of coloured wood; I acquired a second sight for the dimensions of lozenge shapes. Gradually, bit by bit, there emerged from the discordant masses of detail on the table, a scheme, a pattern. Gradually, what I had taken for a turnip was revealed to me as a cockatoo, and what I had thought to be a beetroot became a face. Till, at last, the final piece was fitted, and there stared up at me from the table the sort of picture that I used to paint with water-colours in the nursery: a young girl feeding a rabbit with a lettuce; an old man filling a pipe before a fire; a dog crying for its master in the snow. But I had no eyes for the thing's futility. Out of chaos had I achieved this symmetry. "Wonderful," I said, "simply wonderful." It was the picture that I so apostrophised. But it was myself that I was really praising. How wonderful of me, it was, I felt to have produced this thing. And in the same way when, after an hour's battle, we have restored to sense and English a passage of Joyce's shorthand, we have not the heart to consider the intrinsic value of the thing restored. We are so delighted with ourselves for having done it. "Wonderful," we say, "wonderful," and actually believe it is.

I rather suspect that the year 1922 will be a landmark for the literary historian of our day. *Ulysses* is a sign-post. It will be hardly possible for the two styles of writing, the analytical shorthand and the narrative any longer to imagine that they are hunting together. James Joyce has worked out on the blackboard the piece of algebra over which his pupils have been so long puzzling. *Ulysses* is the answer.

"Life with a big 'L.'" Every generation has its own pet hobby-horse to ride to death, and that's been ours: still is, I think. We are all in search, each of us in our own way, of this strange quality of living that our own existence lacks.

The young poet walks down the steps of the stately mansion where he has been reading his poems aloud to bright-eyed admiration in a softly-lighted, softly-cushioned drawing-room. He hails a taxi, and as he sinks back into the padded seat he ponders the arid monotony of his existence; one day is so like another. Where is the thrill, the mystery of life? He will return to his flat. His clothes will be laid out ready for him. His man will ask him if he will have his bath at once. He will nod. He will undress slowly, will finish reading that review book in his bath; he will linger over his dressing. He is dining with Mrs Spurway. Just such another dinner-party as yesterday's was and to-morrow's will be. Lady Mary will be there and he will have to find occasion to whisper that he loves her as desperately as ever, though he knows too well how rapidly his ardour is cooling. She is like all the rest. And through the

window he contemplates the firm, resolute back of the taxi-driver. How he envies him. That is life. He is not tied to a circle of social obligations. He lives outside the conventions. He is free.

The thoughts of the taxi-driver are not dissimilar. He, too, is pondering the monotony of his existence. How the London streets resemble one another. He has promised to take Mary Gubbins to the pictures that evening; and he remembers that he is getting rather tired of Mary Gubbins; she is like all the rest. He envies the gilded persons whom he bears all day long from one scene of revel to another. It is human to envy the conditions of another's life. The young girl who looks from her bedroom window on to the street below is wooed by its sense of mystery and adventure, and the inspector of omnibus tickets pauses on the top deck to gaze wistfully at the lighted window. It is the hunger for experience, for variety, for a fuller life. We should all like to live a hundred lives, to enter into the heart of every mystery, to feel every human emotion of happiness and sorrow. That is a natural instinct. But its present manifestation is unfortunate. There is a deep-rooted conviction that life is only intense when it is bitter, that waitresses and dustmen and crossing-sweepers have seen deeper into the human heart than bank clerks and schoolmistresses and lawyers, that life is only real when it is raw.

Some years ago a mixed vermouth at the Café Royal resulted in my inclusion in a general invitation to a studio party. An obscure musician was celebrating

his wife's elopement. There were prodigal promises of gin and whisky. Everyone would be there, I was informed. I had nothing to do that evening. I went, in search of life.

It was a surprise. We all have our illusion of Bohemia; all of us, that is to say, who study modern fiction and frequent the cinema. At the back of our mind there is a vivid picture of Bohemia as we would have it; an affair of half-lights and perfumes, and cushions and clinging draperies. Perhaps such a Bohemia exists somewhere. It may do; certainly it ought to. But it had no counterpart in that studio party.

By the time I arrived the party had been in progress a couple of hours. The atmosphere was thick. The floor was covered with cigarette ends and the splinters of broken glass. In various corners of the room partially inebriated couples were lost to the world in amorous abandon. An unwashed, unshaved Italian was strumming on a fiddle. There was a little dancing. A number of loose collared Americans were talking in art jargon at the tops of their voices. In a deep arm-chair, his nose broken, his forehead and eyebrows cut and swollen, a man slept. Whether he had disputed a brother artist's claim to some lady's favours, or whether his legs had been unequal to their task and he had collapsed upon a broken bottle, I was unable to discover. At any rate, he slept. He was a loathsome sight; and, for that matter, the whole party was a pretty loathsome sight. But I was impressed. I was just free from the shackles of military discipline and

etiquette. Here, I thought, was life. Here was a society that had won to freedom, that was divorced from all preconceived opinions, from every superimposed tradition of taste and conduct. It was, indeed, somewhat of a shock to me that the only man in the room who appeared to possess a razor should say in a dry voice, "What a show. Look at all these idiots pretending to be Dostoieffskies." He was right, of course. London is full of people trying to be Dostoieffsky, nursing secretly the grief that they are not epileptic. Dostoieffsky preached the gospel of suffering, and because he spent his life in poverty, the modern idea would appear to be that the only real suffering is material privation, that the man has not lived who has not starved. It is the new snobbery. Once everyone was anxious to establish his descent from a baron. Now everyone is grieved if his pedigree does not contain a dustman.

James Joyce is like that, I fancy: or rather I should say the stuff he writes is. And he could have been so great a writer if he had not been led astray by that reckless heroism of his, that determination at all costs to transcribe life. Perhaps, though, *Ulysses* is more than Journey's End for a certain type of fiction: it may be that it is Journey's End for the novel as a vehicle for narrative; it may be that the novel is played out.

Since the beginning of time the world has had stories told to it. But always in a different form. There was the epic, and that has gone; the ballad, and that has gone; the drama, and that is passing; the novel, and who knows but that the novel as a medium of story-

telling has served its turn, that it is through the cinema that the twentieth century will elect to have its stories told, and that the novel will become a weapon of dialectic, a glorified form of journalism, or purely a medium of psychological investigation.

XIII

I AM uncertain as to the official highbrow attitude towards the "Movies." I am indeed doubtful whether there is one. Highbrowism is supposed to turn on all objects of popular enthusiasm a cold judicial eye, to weigh and compare the manifold futilities of each fresh expression of humanity's imperfect reason, and to deliver a final, an irrevocable judgment. That, at any rate, is what the jaundiced writer would have us think. "A coterie of the intellectuals," he will say. And I suppose it is all right. I suppose that somewhere, in some form, highbrowism does exist. I can only say that I have not met it. The men and women who have been described to me as "impossibly highbrow" reveal themselves for the most part on acquaintance as very simple, ordinary folk who are more interested in cricket than Russian politics, and more interested in law reports than either. This may only be additional evidence of cunning. But, as I say, I have a very real suspicion that highbrowism is nothing more than a popular conception, and that to talk about a "highbrow" attitude is about as sensible as to call seventy million people France and treat them as one person.

But whether highbrowism exists or not, a popular conception is always a useful peg to hang a chapter on.

In the days when I sat at the foot of the history sixth and was driven to deploy, as a screen for my ignorance and idleness, many ingenious devices, I had resort frequently to a ruse which has no doubt in its time assisted many another harassed historian, but which I should like to think was of my own invention. I would manufacture some startlingly dogmatic exaggeration, attribute it to a writer whose name I was careful to conceal, and proceed to illuminate the quotation with historical illustrations. The answer to a question on Prussian diplomacy would, for example, open thus : " A certain eighteenth-century essayist, a writer more remarkable perhaps for the vigour than the accuracy of his assertions, once stated that to be successful it was necessary to be unscrupulous, and though there are fortunately many careers against which no such charge could be rightfully directed, there are others, among which must be unquestionably included that of Bismarck . . ." etc. etc. Such an opening set a note of erudition that would, I hoped, for at least a page and a half, prevent its reader from discovering that the meal I set before him contained " a deal of sack and very little bread."

And so I return to my opening sentence : that though I do not know what is the official highbrow attitude towards the cinema, I should, if I had to define it in a hundred words for a symposium, write something like this. " The highbrow professes to despise the American sobstuff drama : he objects to the conversion into films of plays and novels. He searches in classical presentations for anachronisms and

historical blunders. He enjoys, however, the gymnastics of Douglas Fairbanks, the knockabout comedies, Charlie Chaplin and the Pathé Gazette." And were my opinion to be invited further, I should pronounce myself to be in complete disagreement with this attitude. I enjoy American sobstuff; I feel the right emotions at the right moment. I pray that the misunderstanding between the hero and the heroine may be speedily and effectively removed. It is with extreme difficulty that I restrain myself from rising in my seat to explain to the young ass that the affluent and middle-aged person with whom he saw her at the opera was in fact her uncle. In these days of infinite compression it is not unpleasant to have told one in eighty minutes a story that it would take a day and a half to read, and told on the whole, I find, more entertainingly than in a full-length novel. There are no psychological or sociological interludes; one gets on with the business. Indeed, for ninety-nine per cent. of the long films that are put upon the market, I am, I take it, the sort of person the producer has in mind when he produces them. As the dramatic critic says, "For those that like this sort of thing, this is the sort of thing they like."

But by the short, one-reel affairs I am, I confess, unmoved. It does not amuse me to see the Duke of York inspect Boy Scouts at Northampton, nor am I anxious to learn by what process sardines are transferred from the Atlantic to the breakfast table. Films that are described as "interest" weary me. Nor can I believe that Larry Semon is a comedy king.

Rarely can a civilised people have allowed itself to be entertained by more primitive, less subtle humour. It is entirely of the "top-hat-on-the-chair" variety, and it ends like the Harlequinade, in a chase.

There is, however, one trick in the comedy film which always gets me; the trick of making you, by a reversion of the film and turning of the handle backwards, see an aged and effete man do a standing, backward, fifteen-foot jump on to the top of a narrow wall. You see a plate that has been smashed to atoms recollect itself and become whole. You see milk that has been spilt return to the pitcher. A couple of ruffians have reduced a room in three minutes to utter ruin; the handle is turned and the room restores itself. A miracle, you say. For, although you know perfectly well that it is a trick, you cannot help for the moment being swept into credulence. After all, there, before your eyes, the thing is happening.

It is a pity, I always feel, that the producers make such little play with this device. It could be infinitely diverting. There would be no need for the broken things always to be made whole. It is amusing to see a house that has been blown to atoms rise proudly out of the *débris* into stately indestructibility. But it would be as amusing to see a team of builders slowly, brick by brick, unbuild a mansion. The end would always precede the start. This trick might even be made the vehicle for subtle satire. A maid, for instance, would walk backwards into a tidy drawing-room, and would litter the floor with cigarette ash, cover the shelves with dust, and disturb the papers on your desk. Nor

would it be necessary for the producer to confine himself to material accidents. He could describe thus the backward development of the emotions and the sensations. Imagine, let us say, a day lived backwards, as the film would show it you.

You would rise from your bed at midnight, and wearily put on your evening clothes. You might discover that you were drunk, but though you would spend the next two hours at a table with walnuts and wine in front of you, the shells of the walnuts would become whole and the glass that you raised to your lips would be empty ; while the glass that you replaced before you would be full. You would in fact rise from the table sober. You would pass through curious states of mind. You would sit down to read a book knowing the plot, the theme, the treatment ; but, as you read, this knowledge would pass page by page from you. And you would rise from your armchair saying : " I've just got this new book by Michael Sadleir from the library. I think I shall enjoy it." It might be the afternoon of an assignation. Languid and quiescent would you come to the arms of love ; vibrant and eager-eyed would you leap from them. As the sun moved eastward, carrying you to three o'clock, you would find yourself sitting warm and comfortable in the Café Royal, the stump of a cigar between your fingers, an empty liqueur glass on the table. But in two hours' time you would be refolding a napkin and telling your guest that you hoped he was as uncommonly hungry as you were.

And then you would be washing your hands. As you

dried them they would become less dry until they were quite wet, and you would place them, white and glistening, into a basin of dirty water, and all the dirt from the water would settle upon your hands, till the water was clean and your hands were grubby: and when the water was quite clean you would take your hands from it and they would become instantly dry and dirty and uncomfortable. You would put on your coat and you would walk backwards out of the restaurant towards your office.

And so the day would pass. At your office you would forget matters that an hour earlier you had settled, and you would seek information of them from your secretary. As the sun sank eastwards you would grow less hungry. You would indeed feel increasingly comfortable till you found yourself at the breakfast table and were forced to watch your empty plate become filled with kidneys and bacon and tomatoes. Finally, after you had bathed and had shaved, and in the process had restored to your chin its rough, bristly appearance, you would be lying in bed, clear-eyed, fresh, ready for the day's work; you would be watching the sun sink slowly behind a bank of cloud: "A glorious day," you would say to yourself. You would watch the maid move quietly about the room; she would lower the blinds; the room would become dark. You would feel a little dazed, a little drowsy. For a moment you would wonder where you were. There would be a loud knock upon the door; you would find yourself in the bitter throes of a nightmare; its agony would

pass. You would drift into a deep, untroubled sleep.

But that, you will say, is an ordinary, and on the whole rather unromantic day. It is the hour of stress, of delirium, of turmoil, that if the past is to be relived you would ask to see again. Let the operator have done, you say, with this traffic of routine. Let us be transported to something of greater matter. We must make a choice ? To the hour, then, of that first dance together, to that hour of which the memory can never leave us ; to that hour than which we have known nothing fresher, keener, more romantic.

So be it ; you are once again in that silk-hung alcove, in your ears the sound of music and the stir of feet, in your heart a brimming ecstasy. Let the handle turn. You are sitting there alone. The grey curtain is drawn back ; she steps towards you. You do not notice her partner. He bows, steps backward, leaving you together. The sound of music ceases. There is a silence. Your arms are about her neck, your lips are against hers. You draw back, you look into her eyes, deep wide eyes, hazel, below the fringe of hair : the dark brown hair that is curled in a plaited loop about her ears ; you think how wonderful it would be to kiss her. Your hand slips from hers and you are talking, eagerly, happily, and she is smiling up at you and you are thinking : " If this could last for ever." You are in the ballroom. She is in your arms. What are they playing, she asks you, although you have told her it is " Honolulu Eyes." You have never known that a valse could be like this. Life is suddenly

a very marvellous, a very precious thing. The music ceases ; you stand beside her talking. You are thinking, " In a moment I shall be dancing with her. In a moment she will be in my arms." Your hostess is beside you. Your name and hers are murmured in introduction. She is walking away, backwards, beside your hostess. You are thinking, " I am going to be introduced to her." She is standing in the doorway of the ballroom. You are dazzled by her as she hesitates there for a moment, radiant in the black, low-waisted dress ; then she turns behind the curtain. And all knowledge, all memory of her is lost. You have never met her. You are tired and dispirited ; life has become a worthless, an empty thing. Nothing remains of that high ecstasy, except far down a vague resentment that no such miracle has come to you.

And you have had enough of the film. It is all very amusing, no doubt, to see one's life lived backwards, to recover one's old enthusiasms and prejudices and loyalties. But it is rather a cruel business, with the evening coming before dawn ; friendships must end at the hour when they begin ; the first kiss must always be the last ; and you sit in your chair and draw uncomfortable parallels and wonder whether old age is not rather like that : the reversal of the film. Whether there will not come a time at forty-five, at fifty, or at sixty when you will find yourself sitting at the banquet, confident and happy, in harmony with yourself and with your companions, replete with the good things of life. And then slowly the wheel will turn. The scene of repose will pass. You will

gradually cease to be full of good food and wine. You will grow a little cold, a little hungry. You will find yourself among strangers; you will be embarrassed and unhappy, and you will rise from the table with the *mauvais quart d'heure* in front of you.

A far-fetched simile, and one that will, doubtless, hardly bear examination. Morbid, too, perhaps, but then it is the privilege of youth to make "copy" of its grey hairs. It is only natural that our imagination should fly like a scout before us into the country where we must travel. Age is as real to us now as our youth will be to us when we are old. It is distant, unknown: romantic therefore. How will it come to us, we wonder, this trial which must make or break us? In what words will it address us, in what shape present itself? With what armour shall we be defended? Shall we pass petulantly, resentfully, with struggles, into middle-age? Shall we cry, as does a child in the nursery impotently over a broken toy? Shall we beat our hands against the barred gates of the enchanted garden? It is inconceivable that there should not be one such moment of rage and bitterness and of frustration. But will it be slow in passing? That is the question that we ask ourselves. Shall we find it difficult to shrug our shoulders, to say: "The wine is different, but it is still good."

We seek our answer in the companionship of age. Venerable, white-haired gentlemen who spend their afternoons asleep in the libraries of their clubs, are messengers to us from that far country. They know the geography of the road that we must travel. They

have left much behind them on the road. They, too, knew once courage and danger and ambition. But it is not pity that we bring them for the loss of this rich merchandise. We do not contrast consciously their weariness with our vigour, our hope with their resignation, their weakness with our capacity. We come in a mood of humble curiosity; is there comfort, we ask them at that last tavern: Life is a bargain; you have lost much; does the exchange content you?

And they tell us so little. They brag extravagantly of their youth, of their feats and gallantries and disasters. "We lived, and fought and suffered, and life was good." But they overact the part. They are too hearty about it. We are what they were once, and we know it to be a far less ecstatic business than they would have us think. When they appeal in contrast to our sympathies, we feel that they are, on the whole, really rather enjoying themselves. After a certain age people seem to lose the power of self-criticism. They will not place their life as they have made it beside their life as they had hoped to make it. They pretend to be something they are not. Instead of finding themselves, they lose themselves.

But occasionally, now and again, one does meet an old man who will tell you the truth about himself, who will not try and dramatise his life, who will face the past as once he could face the future, with unbandaged eyes. Such a man I have the privilege to number among my friends. We meet casually, once or twice a month, in our club at lunch. And usually we sit together afterwards over our coffee and liqueurs.

And in the summer we can watch from the terrace the grey water of the river moving sluggishly below us, bearing pleasure-boats, tramps, and steamers on its muddied surface, carrying them to sea or harbour. And we find it easy to talk there of the drift and hurry, the traffic and confusion of human life, and of that abiding rhythm that makes out of discord, harmony.

He speaks always unassumingly, always confidently, as a man should who has achieved balance.

" Life is still as entertaining to me," he will say, " as surprising, as adventurous as it was thirty years ago. I am the spectator, and that is the only difference. I sit ' quiet handed ' in the shadow and find the answer to much that, when I was young, puzzled me.

" At sixty we cease to make love, if we are wise. *On fait voyeur* and women lift their mask. It is our recompense for the loss of youth : this privilege of confidence."

He talks to me of his friends whom he has the leisure to observe and understand, and in particular of a certain lady who has flavoured the charm of youth with widowhood.

" A man of my age," he says, " may speak of all things, even of love, with complete propriety to a young and attractive person. And as I sit beside her in that softly-lighted drawing-room, in that dusk of lilac and lavender, with the sound of a woman's voice about me, and before my eyes the loveliness of brown hair and hazel eyes and pouted mouth, and in my heart the knowledge that she could love, I reflect how once I should have been the prisoner of a single impulse,

and I tell myself I am happier now, sitting there, listening while she lays bare her soul to me as thirty years ago she might have revealed her body.

"'It isn't worth it, my dear Gerald,' she will say; 'really it isn't worth it. There's so little harmony, so much friction. We read of love at first sight, of people rushing into each other's arms. But how often does that happen? Half the time we are trying to make a man who is indifferent fall in love with us, and the other half to get rid of a man who has begun to weary us. It's always the same.'

"There is a pause, and she leans back against the high-heaped pile of cushions with a little sigh that is half-boredom and half-petulance.

"'There was Roger, now,' she says. 'I didn't care for him a bit at first. I thought he was uncouth and ill-mannered, and he would so pester me to go out with him. And when I did go out I used to be oh! so bored. He never said anything: he just sat opposite, gazing at me with greedy, adoring eyes, and then one day he kissed me. I shall never forget that moment. We were standing, after a game of tennis, in the shade of that big oak tree by the lake at Barolin, leaning against the bridge, and suddenly I felt his fingers on my arms, hard and compelling. I was swung round against him. "You little fool," he said, "I am sick of this. You have got to love me!" And then he kissed me.'

"Only a week ago she told me that. The wide-set, luminous eyes were dilated and very tender; the lines of the pouted mouth became softer and less sensual. Then she shrugged her shoulders and was once again the

petulant, cynical child of pleasure. 'But afterwards,' she sighed.

"'You had that moment, though,' I said, and I began to quote from Meredith: "'Love that had robbed us of immortal things.' But she interrupted me. 'I know, I know, but I had to pay for it, and I am asking myself whether it was worth the price. Men and women, they are just paths that intersect and then go their own ways. We had a while of perfect harmony; then Roger grew tired of me at the very moment when I had really begun to love him. Although I knew that he didn't love me, I tried to keep him; and that's degrading, it hurts one's self-respect. It's always like that, or else it's the other way; one wants a man, one woos him, one makes love to him; and then as soon as one's got him, one's tired of him.'

"'From which,' I said, 'one may gather that you are finding Paul a little too exacting.'

"The hazel eyes flashed a look of grateful recognition.

"'There's nothing about that man, my dear, that doesn't absolutely exasperate me, and he won't let me alone. He rings me up every hour of the day; he sends me letters by special messenger. I can't get away from him. It seems incredible to me that eighteen months ago I couldn't be happy away from him; that I could think of nothing but him; that my heart beat every time I heard the postman's knock, every time the bell of the telephone rang. I don't know how it happened. His wife, I think, very largely. I hated her, the great fat cow, so domineering and unwomanly. I hated the proprietary way in which she

said, " my husband." I wanted to humble her. There was pity in it, too: Paul looked so forlorn as he sat plucking at his beard while his wife's voice boomed across the dinner table. But it's hard enough to know how one felt a year and a half ago, let alone the " why " of it. I wanted him; that's all that matters. I wanted him. It took a long time: little by little I broke down his reserve. I felt his sympathy, his interest in me, change to tenderness. His voice was like a diffident caress. I longed to throw myself into his arms; to be his utterly; to give him love as no other woman had ever given it him; and, then, within a couple of months he had become as every other man. They are all much the same when the glamour has passed. And, of course, I began to mean more to him every day; an endless flow of telephone calls and special messengers; desperate, imploring notes. He must see me. He couldn't exist away from me. And all the time I was growing more and more tired of him; he exasperated me with his quiet voice and woman's hands. I began to hate all the things about him that I had loved before: his weakness, his diffidence, his self-pity, his ceaseless references to his wife: how she bullied him; how he was dependent on her; how it would break his father's heart were he to leave her; how he could not bear to leave his child. I grew as impatient of those two words " my wife," as once I had of that proprietary " my husband." I wanted to scream at him, " For God's sake, be a man! " I tried to make him jealous by talking to him of earlier love affairs. No one, not even you, Gerald, knows as much

about me as he does. I've told him all those little intimate things that would have made any other man hate me or hate himself for loving me. But nothing moved him.

" ' I told him once of a quarrel that I had had with Roger. Roger had threatened to leave me, never to see me again. I said nothing. I stood straight up in front of him, looking him in the eyes; then, with a sudden sweep, I tore away from my arms the soft silk of my evening dress, and stood there, my shoulders bare, the white skin stained with the bruises of our love-making. We stood there, we said nothing, but we read in our eyes those things of memory for which there are no words. Then he took a quick step forward, caught me in his arms and kissed away our quarrel. I told Paul that. " There was a man," I said to him. I flung the words at him as one flings a glove in a challenge. But he didn't hit back. He said none of the things he might have said. He just took my hand. " Margaret," he said, " I can't love you in that way; each man has his own way of loving, and that isn't mine. But in my own way I love you more than the others have. Do believe that, my dear, I do—I do ! " '

" ' What was I to do, Gerald—what was I to say ? I was moved. What woman wouldn't be ? I felt a pig, and kissed him, and let him make love to me. That's the worst of those people—they get under one's guard; they disarm one; one can't hurt them; they are too weak; and, oh ! Gerald, it's more than I can stand. It's hateful to have a coward for a lover : I'd much rather be a strong man's toy. I keep saying to

myself: "Margaret, my girl, you've got to make an end of this." But I can't. He always gets round me in the end. You can only fight what's stronger than yourself.'

"She paused, out of breath, flushed, bright-eyed, amazingly attractive. Then, in a sudden, chastened voice, 'Oh! Gerald, Gerald, why don't people keep pace with one another in love, why don't they fall in love at the same time and fall out of love at the same time? Why must it be a race in which everyone is handicapped, and starts at different times and different paces, when it is all a chasing and a being chased, and there is only a few yards of running side by side together?'

"Never before, I think, had she so completely revealed herself to me, or it would, perhaps, be more true to say never before had she revealed that particular facet of her personality. She had become suddenly a woman wistful and self-doubting, frightened of her mortality, saddened by the contrast between the dream and the actuality, by the passage of good things.

"I sat watching her, held silent in the spell of her beauty, wondering what next would come, when, from below, came the faint ring of an electric bell, the sound of an opening door, the soft stir of feet on Axminster.

"'Mr Paul Johnson, madam!'

"There was a pause. I saw a look, half terror, half relief, pass across Margaret's face; then she appeared to pull herself together. 'Very well, Parker,' she said, 'show him up.'

"I rose to go. But she stretched out a hand of admonition.

"'No, please, Gerald, no,' she said, in a fluttered, nervous voice. 'It may be—I don't know—I'd rather you stayed.'

"I had known Paul Johnson for a long time. I had seen him change from a silent youth into a diffident, ineffectual man; I had been present at his wedding; and I had felt vaguely sorry for him as I shook hands with his bride and scanned for a hurried moment the hard-set rigor of her mouth. I had noticed his absence from the club, and learnt later of his resignation. From time to time I had seen him at dinner parties and garden parties, always silent, almost shy, his eyes timidly following his wife. I had not seen him, though, since his romance with Margaret. I was curious to know if it had altered him, whether he was more of a man, more confident, or whether he had been overwhelmed, scorched, shrivelled by the hot flame of her love for him.

"His appearance, as he stood for a moment irresolute in the centre of the room, shifting from one foot to the other, with one finger plucking at the bottom button of his waistcoat and his other hand raised to stroke the curling down of his beard, gave me small guide to whatsoever change the past eighteen months might have worked in him. He was obviously the prey of one emotion, an emotion that obliterated the chance characteristics of environment. He was a man wounded, frightened, desperate. Without acknowledging my presence, without seeming even to notice

me he began to pour forth an eager stream of words.

" ' Oh, Margaret, my dear ! my dear ! I don't know what to do, it's terrible after all these months, after all we've meant one to another, for this to happen. Oh ! my dear ! my dear ! '

" He stumbled towards her, sat on the edge of the footstool at her feet, and leant his face forward in his hands.

" She rested her hand upon his shoulder.

" ' What is it, Paul, darling ? '

" Her voice was soft and caressing : the note of anger and impatience had passed from it utterly. ' That is how he will always win her back to him,' I thought. ' He is weak and makes her pity him, a sort of maternal mistress.'

" And again her voice said gently : ' What is it, my darling, tell me ? '

" For an answer he dived his hand into his breast pocket, withdrew a letter, and handed it to her.

" ' Read that,' he said. ' It'll explain everything. Someone has written to my wife, has told her all about us. You'll see, it's there, read it ! '

" She took the letter, a short, five-line thing, unsigned, undated. Her cheeks flushed, she turned to him and laid her hand on his. ' Oh, Paul ! ' she said, ' Paul ! '

" There was a poignant, dramatic silence. Then he spoke again in the calm tones of despair.

" ' There's nothing to be done ; you know how things are with me. I am weak, I daresay, but I'll

have to do what my wife wants. There's my father, you see: it would break his heart, and our child, I can't leave him with my wife; I can't, I owe that much to him.'

"'So it's over then, Paul?'

"He nodded, and I could see, from the sudden paling of the flesh, how tightly her fingers were pressing upon his. It seemed to me that at the moment of separation they had won back to the ecstasy of their first embraces: that they were nearer now than they had been for many months.

"I rose from my chair.

"'Good-bye, Margaret, my dear,' I said. 'Good-bye!'

"She said nothing, but the eyes that met mine were dim and very tender.

"And as I walked down the street I pondered the contradictions, the inequalities of life. Only a few minutes ago she was praying to be rid of him, and now she could ask for nothing better than to be for all time within his arms."

He paused; for comment; for encouragement.

"And the sequel?" I said.

He smiled.

"Three days later," he said, "I met her at a friend's house.

"'So it's over?' I said to her.

"She nodded.

"'And have you any idea who wrote the letter?'

"She made no answer, but across her lips and in her

eyes flickered a curious smile, a smile that was part cunning, part pride, part triumph.

" ' I wonder,' I continued, ' if it was a man or a woman. A woman more likely. Constance, perhaps, or Mrs. Berridge, or Marjorie Godwin—Marjorie was once in love with him, so they said, it might have been she.'

" ' I shouldn't think so ! ' And the curious smile deepened, grew more baffling, more evocative, more triumphant.

" Suddenly I had a wave of intuition ; our eyes met in the glance of two conspirators who share a secret.

" ' Margaret,' I said, ' you wrote that letter.'

" The curious smile became infinitely suggestive. ' But, my dear,' she said, ' of course.' "

XIV

IT must make good drinking, that after-battle wine! We only play football, I sometimes think, for the sake of that hour of indolence and exhaustion, when we lie back in comfort after a hot bath, stiff and tired, to fight the afternoon's struggle over again. It is good to get our innings over early and sit in the pavilion with a pint pot at the elbow while we watch our successors battle in the sunlight, and if we happen to have made a few, the world is a very companionable spot. It is worth while taking trouble out there in the open if only for that after-sense of security and content. There is no temptation then to grumble and feel jealous of those whose wickets are still intact and whose innings is in front of them. And it is worth our while for the sake of those fifteen years or so, when we shall stand above the battle, to make the most of our youth while it is with us. If we realise ourselves, if we live fully now, we shall be more sociable, more generous, more kindhearted when the arteries begin to thicken. We shall be able to look the younger generation in the face. We shall welcome it as a host should, courteously. If we are wise now, or rather if we make a wisdom of our indifference, we will come to find our last ten years the happiest of all.

There are indeed times when we are inclined to welcome the infirmities and immunities of age.

During the coal strike of 1921 my platoon was protecting the property of the Shell Motor Spirit Company in Newcastle. It was a dismal enough spot, beside the river. There was a long row of miners' cottages between my billet and the guard-room, and after tea the women would sit upon their doorsteps and talk to one another, while the children played on a strip of grass that ran dingily to the waterside. Beyond a more or less mechanical supervision I had very little work to do, and in the evenings I would stand in the roadway and watch the dusk rise slowly from the river, to soften the harsh outline of chimney stack and factory. I grew lonely and a little wistful as the twilight settled caressingly on the poor houses that the sunlight had made so drab. Evening is always beautiful. And I used to indulge the hour of sentiment with romantic reveries concerning a young and charming girl who would sit evening after evening knitting beside her mother.

I can recall now not a single feature of her ; whether she was dark or fair or tall ; but I seem to recollect vaguely that she was plump and that the light in her eyes was roguish. I used to think how pleasantly a love affair would enliven the tedium of military routine. I had not, let it be clearly understood, the slightest intention of embarking on such an enterprise. On the lowest grounds, it would have been unsoldierlike behaviour. The preliminaries, at any rate, would have been staged in full view of my platoon. And an officer

should not encourage in the private soldier a suspicion that he is a creature of the same clay and of the same instincts. There is much to be said for the Ouida convention of beer in the canteen and champagne in the mess.

But dreams are agreeable things, and my fancy created a number of romantic situations in which that girl and myself might at some later day find ourselves. I never came out of my billet without a slight quickening of the pulses. "Will she be there?" I asked myself. "Will she be as pretty as she was yesterday?" Once she smiled at me, and my vanity began to wonder whether she too was not regretting that there lay between us the barrier of military rank. Perhaps she, too, was musing wistfully in the twilight on the inequalities of time and place. Perhaps she, too, was dreaming of some romantic encounter in a lane in spring-time on the Cornish cliffs.

"You!" I should gasp. And we should stand still, gazing at one another. And then we should both begin to talk eagerly at once. "I so wanted to speak to you," I should say.

"I, too," she would reply. And we should walk together arm-in-arm along the lane by the tall cliffs, standing perhaps silent for a while saddened by the permanence of these high cliffs. So were they yesterday, so would they be to-morrow; their silence might well seem a criticism of our enchantment.

But it would pass quickly enough, that fleeting sorrow, in the bright sunlight of an April day. And she would tell me that she was not really the daughter

of a Tyneside miner, but of an impoverished country Squire, married to a rich cad, in part settlement of an overdue account. "I could not stand it," she would say, "I ran away. But he found me, he dragged me back. He is with me now in the hotel at Boscastle."

But she should never go back to him. We should rush to Padstow and catch the next train to town. I should hurry round to Grant Richards. "Trouble," I should say, "I'm going to Austria to-morrow. I must have a hundred pounds at once. My address to no one." A terrific story, I felt, ending perhaps with a duel on the steps of a Viennese hotel. I had indeed already begun to wonder what editor I should approach with its scenario when the dream was broken.

I detected her, shortly before lights out, leaning in the dark corner of a wall against the beating breast of a junior lance-sergeant.

If I had been sixty instead of twenty-two, I should have been doubtless highly thrilled by the discovery. I should not, indeed, have even included myself in my romantic reverie. I should have selected an attractive member of my platoon and ordaining that he should fall in love with her, I should have watched their love-making with that mixture of subjective and objective interest with which we watch the love-making of the cinema and the stage. I should have identified myself, through my imagination, with their rapture. It would have been a focussing of myself, like the writing of a love-story is when, for a while, one ceases to be oneself, or perhaps becomes oneself more truly in the persons of one's hero and one's heroine.

There must be rough sea, though, before the calm waters of harbourage are reached. Many stories of first love have been written, but I cannot at the moment remember a single story about last love. I do not mean the "Père Goriot," or "Poor Folk"; the "gaga" love affairs. I mean a story of purposeful, commanding love; a love that is at its dawn fine and fresh and vigorous; but that comes too late in life, that pilfers the last years of manhood, that wastes and exhausts itself; but to which its object clings desperately, knowing it is for the last time, knowing that he will not have the faith, the strength, the confidence to begin again. And it must come very often, such a love; must be, as often as not, an inevitable stage in the natural development of man; must mark the passage of the borderland between middle-age and age.

Take, as an example, a prosperous man in the middle fifties, a politician shall we say, grey-haired, grey-bearded, with a strong, massive, heavily-lined face. His second daughter has been married for two years. He is emotionally unattached. His wife has been to him for many years little more than a companion. He can no longer live as he had lived for the ten or twelve years previously, in his daughters. He has begun to weary somewhat of the evasion, the deceit, the insincerity of party politics. He meets at a friend's house a young girl who has ideas of going on the stage. It is not difficult to understand their attraction for one another. She is small, dainty, with light flaxen hair bobbed low at the neck, and drawn back tightly from her forehead, so that it may bunch widely like clustering

flowers about her ears. Her eyes are blue, a pale, corn-flower blue; she is not pretty, perhaps; she is the sort of girl who would look very ordinary in a photograph, for the charm of her features lies in their mobility. She is never still. She is listening eagerly, or talking eagerly, and her laughs are quick and short, like commas in her conversation. There is a gulf of over thirty years between them. But her innocence responds to his experience. He can teach her so much. And for him the greed of life, the curiosity, the freshness, the enthusiasm of those dancing eyes and laughing lips speak of a country in which he will never again travel.

He wins her as she would be won. There is no diffidence, no hesitation in his wooing. They lunch together; there is no word of love between them. He talks of himself and not of her; of the men he has known, the places he has visited, of his early days in politics; his first campaign, that reversal of a two-thousand vote majority. He mentions casually as men of his acquaintance the great men of the hour. And, as he talks, the spell of his domination is falling over her. She does not analyse the sensation, does not ask herself whether or not she is in love with him. But she knows that here is a man to whom she could trust herself, in whose arms she would find surely, and to its full, the relief of self-surrender.

Two days later they dine together. It is the first time she has ever been to the Savoy. She is thrilled and frightened by the glare of lights, and is measurably grateful for the guiding hand at her elbow. In this new atmosphere of luxury and display she feels more

than ever the need of his experience. She notices with pride and pleasure the assurance with which he follows the bowing waiter to their table at the far end of the room, and he does not embarrass her by handing her a menu and asking her what she will choose. He decides what they shall have. "A savoury dinner, I think," he says, "caviare; turtle soup and *truite au bleu* and a pheasant, and perhaps—yes, I think we'll have an anchovy savoury to finish up with. And a bottle of that 103." Ninety seconds and it is over. It is she this time who does the talking. She is happy and excited, and she tells him of her ambitions, of her hopes to get an engagement in a touring company. "It won't be much fun," she said, "but I shall get to know people and I shall get experience." He smiles. "We must see what we can do for you," he says.

They dance afterwards, and she finds, as she had expected, that he dances well, if conventionally, following closely the pattern of the music. She is lulled by the rhythm of the dance, upheld by the pressure of his hand upon her shoulder. She misses her step once, and his toe strikes against her instep. He apologises, but in a tone that reminds her that the fault is hers, not his. And for the first time in her life she is content to be corrected. He makes no avowal of love to her as they drive home in the taxi, but just before the car slows down before her door his hand closes firmly over hers. "Wednesday, then, at one o'clock," he says. She nods her head, weak, happy and submissive.

There is never any talk of marriage. He has his

political career. There are his daughters. For their sake he must keep his name free of scandal. And even if he were free it is doubtful if she would want to marry him. Over thirty years between them. She will not want to spend some of the best years of her life nursing an old man. But she is content that as long as their love lasts he should give her his protection. For a while they are wonderfully happy. In his arms and against his lips she comes into the rich kingdom of her womanhood. Through her he wins back to the lost countries of his youth.

They are happy days. He takes her to restaurants of which she only knows the name, places over which her imagination has spread the high colour of romance. They go to theatres and dances and music-halls, and they know always there is waiting for them the little flat that he has furnished for her so prettily, and where their love makes the hours pass on such swiftly sandalled feet.

She abandons naturally her scheme of joining a touring company. For a few months, indeed, she forgets her ambition in her happiness, and by the time she has begun again to feel the lure of grease-paint and the footlights, the influence and affluence of her protector has found her a leading part in a forthcoming West-end production. Marvellously grateful she is, marvellously happy. The days of excitement as the first night draws near are almost more than she can bear, and it means much to her to have at such a time a strong arm about her shoulders, and in her ears the sound of a firm voice.

She need, though, have had no fears of failure. It is a good play, and she has talent. But it is at the very moment of her triumph that her lover is, for the first time, frightened. He stands in the shadow of the box and watches her in the front of the stage bending, over a bank of bouquets, to an audience hoarse with shouting. He sees suddenly into the heart of their relationship. He sees her a young woman at the start of her career—fresh, radiant, intoxicated with the sensation of a first success. And he is an ageing man, with the best of life behind him. How can he hope to keep her? She will find herself now the centre of a circle of brilliant and charming persons. She will be invited to houses where, for his good name's sake, he can hardly accompany her. Now that she is a public figure he must be careful of her reputation and of his. He will not be able to go about with her so much. She will make her own friends. She will forget him. He will have been a stepping-stone in her life; nothing more.

For him there is in their love-making no longer a solid, satisfying comfort, only an occasional moment in which he may forget. Life catches her up. She has luncheon engagements and week-end parties. And, as soon as the curtain falls, she is being rushed away to dances at Murray's or at Ciro's. The names of her new friends, Christian names for the most part, trip from her tongue at every turn of her conversation. He knows none of them; they are strangers to him. And he realises that now she has found her feet in the world he has lost his hold over her. She needs his help no longer. He cannot exert the dominating influence of experience

and success. Probably she has begun to think of him already as an old man.

Is she still faithful to him, he wonders. He knows what are the morals of the green-room—one intrigue after another. "And the people concerned," he reminds himself, "are always the very last to hear anything." He makes enquiries furtively about her especial friends. He finds himself listening in his club to the tedious reminiscences of obsolete tragedians. He asks chance acquaintances in the train whether they have ever heard of her. "That's a wonderful discovery," he says, "that new star at the Adelphi." And he waits anxiously, in case the stranger may have some scandal to tell of her. He sees very little of her now. "But you cannot think how one thing comes on the top of another," she explains. "All these people; its business half of it, and I am so happy. And you want me to be happy, don't you, darling?" And every day he grows more jealous; every day the strain grows greater. Night after night she is supping and dancing, at other people's expense; and in this world people don't give anything for nothing, especially that type of person. There are times when he thinks he would give anything to be certain, to know one way or another. But there are others when he knows that that knowledge is the one thing which he would avoid. He is almost certain that there is something between her and that young barrister he saw her dining with last Sunday at the Berkeley. But he dare not make sure. He dare not be forced to break with her.

For he knows that if he once broke with her he would

have to say good-bye to love for ever. He knows that he has not the faith, nor the strength, to begin again. He has lived ten years in the last eighteen months, and ten years bring him very close to the prescribed limits of a life's endurance. He can no longer say, as he could in the early forties, what is one love affair, is not the world companionably full of free-hearted ladies? This is the last time, the very last. He has not the courage to say good-bye to pleasure.

And then one evening the crested wave of jealousy is at its height. There is an all-night sitting at the House, and he is walking from his club to Westminster. It is just after eleven. The theatres are emptying into Piccadilly. The pavements are crowded. Along the streets cars and taxis are hurrying their occupants in search of further entertainment. He follows enviously the momentary view of bright interiors. He regrets the long hours that await him, on a hard bench, listening to dull speeches. He could wish that he were young again, forgetting in the evening's intoxication the morning's bills and overdrafts. And suddenly he catches in the corner of a taxi, lit suddenly by the glare of a street lamp, a glimpse of flaxen hair drawn back tight from a forehead, of hair bunching like clustering flowers about the ears, of pale blue cornflower eyes, and of lips so close against a man's that they have just been kissed, or are about to kiss. A second and the taxi is again in shadow.

Slowly, an old man, he turns and walks back westward to Piccadilly. He could not, after such a sight, endure the superficial oratory, the unreal antagonism

of the House. He must be alone on such an evening with his thoughts. Backwards and forwards he paces up and down his long, book-lined study. Was it she, he wonders. It was for only the merest fraction of a second that the glare of the lamp had revealed the dark interior. And there must be so many girls with flaxen hair and pale cornflower blue eyes.

Not like hers, though, not quite like hers: never anywhere had he seen such eyes, such hair. And he had learnt during the last year to know by heart every changing light and shadow of those loved features. Surely he could not make a mistake about her now. But even if it were she, what then? What was a kiss after all? To some girls it meant everything. There were some girls whose lips once yielded would be ready to surrender all. There were others to whom a kiss was no more than the casual brushing of a hand; who kissed out of kindliness, out of affection. And surely she would be one of them, she who was kissed every night before a thousand people, with the limelight on her upturned face, by a man for whom she had on the whole almost a physical dislike. What could kisses mean to her?

And yet how shy she had been when he had first kissed her, nearly two years ago. She had trembled and had sat on the edge of the sofa in that private room, her fingers plucking at her skirt, afraid to look at him. It had passed swiftly enough, that nervousness. But she had not been then the girl to exchange kisses lightly with any man. And if she had become so since, the change had not been of his making.

The heavy alabaster clock on the mantelpiece strikes one. She should be back by now. They have agreed so often that if an actress is to be fresh for her work next day, she cannot dance away her energy, night after night, till morning. They have talked so often of the wisdom of cutting one's supper parties short. "A couple of hours, darling, that's all one needs." And there is a matinée next day. Surely she will be home by now. He walks across to his desk and lifts the receiver of the telephone. "Hammerton 5769," he calls. The operator repeats the number. He sits there, the receiver against his ear, waiting, waiting for the sound of the quick, breathless voice that will put all his anxieties to sleep. But it does not come. Perhaps she is asleep. It was selfish of him to ring her up. She was tired and has returned straight to the flat after the theatre. The vision in the taxi was the trick of a disordered fancy. He will have woken her up. She will be angry with him. He will send her some flowers in the morning and she will forgive him. But no answer comes. And after a long delay a sleepy, masculine voice informs him that he can "get no answer, sir." But he is sure he has the right number? "Yes, sir, Hammerton 5769."

He restores the receiver to its place. She is not there. She is a light sleeper; she would have been sure to wake. Comes to him the memory of an evening fourteen months ago, the evening of his big speech in the House on Ireland. He had returned, eager and elated, and he had felt that he must tell her of his triumph. A sleepy voice had answered him, a voice

that had instantly lost its sleepiness when it had realised who was speaking. "Oh, you, darling," she had said. "Yes, what is it?"

And she had listened intently to his account of the night's debate.

"But I'm a selfish pig," he had said, "waking you up like this."

And in his whole life he had never known anything more intense than the thrill with which he had heard her quick, breathless answer.

"But, my darling, you know, surely, I want you to, always, always. It's the next best thing to seeing you."

Those were the days when she had been never too busy, too late, too pre-occupied to talk to him, or see him. He had often come to the flat after a long, night's sitting, and she had rekindled the fire for him. and had sat before it leaning back against his knees. That had passed, of course, inevitably, in the nature of things. But something surely should have come to take its place. Surely they should have built for themselves some abiding mansion. Had they squandered their capital? Was there nothing left for them?

Backwards and forwards he paces up and down his study. She is not home yet, and he knows that till she is home, sleep is impossible for him. He would lie tossing in bed at the mercy of his fevered fancy. He must know one way or another. It is a quarter of an hour since he rang up. She is back by now perhaps. Again he raises the receiver. Again he calls her num-

ber. Again there is the long delay. Again the sleepy, "Sorry, I can get no answer, sir."

This time he does not rise from the chair. He takes the watch from his pocket and leans it in front of him against the pedestal of the telephone. "Every ten minutes," he says, "I will ring her up. I will know the exact minute at which she returns. I will see that she does not lie to me. I shall know whether she is telling me the truth or not."

And every ten minutes from half past one to two, and from two to three, he raises the receiver and calls in the same steady voice, "Hammerton 5769." And every time there is the same delay and then the same answer. He does not move from the chair. The fire has become a dull glow among charred ashes; the room is cold. But he sits there, his eyes fixed on the second hand of his watch as it eats into the minutes.

Then suddenly a new fear comes to him. She has been home all the time. She has brought her lover with her and refuses to be disturbed. He can see them in the warm dusk of her room, the small table lamp casting through its silk covering a pale rose radiance upon the white linen of the lace-fringed pillows, heightening the beauty of her face, as she turns it to meet his kisses. There is the ring of the telephone in the other room.

"Your silly old man," he says, and they laugh together. And he places his hands over her ears that she shall not hear it, and his lips wander over her face and neck. The bell stops ringing, and once more his hands are about her and his mouth is against her ear

whispering: "Now I can tell you again how much I love you."

He sees it with the hard clarity of jealousy and foiled desire. He rises quickly, pushing his chair sideways as he does so, and strides backwards and forwards across the room. There is the sound of an opening door upon the landing, the patter of slippered feet upon the staircase, the rap of a knuckle in the passage. "Come in," he says. And his wife is standing in the doorway.

Old and shrivelled and pathetic she looks, with her sparse hair falling over the black and gold of her long silk dressing-gown. And yet she is younger than he is; he remembers they are both old stuff, and there rises in him the suffocating need for sympathy, for maternal kindliness, for someone to whom he can say in his loneliness: "I'm tired; I'm an old man: be good to me."

"But, my dear," she says, "I thought you would be at the House all night."

"I know, I know," he says, on his guard instantly against surrender. "It wasn't very interesting, and I thought—well, I just came back and I've been reading for a few minutes before going up."

But the moment he has said it he realises that she does not believe him. She has heard the crash of his chair beside the telephone: that is what has awakened her; and she has heard him striding up and down the room, and there is no book lying open on the table; there is no chair drawn before the fire, and in the grate only a few dull coals; no whisky on the small

table; no cigar smoke; no feature of the usual setting for an evening's reading, and, after thirty years of marriage, a wife knows her husband's habits.

"My dear," she begins. But he will not let her finish. At all events he must protect himself against discovery and against this fatal weakness in himself that would fling him before her on his knees and on her pity. "It's quite all right," he says; "I shall be going up in a minute. I just want to settle my mind a bit first. I can't sleep if I'm at all excited. And you'll be catching cold, dear, here. You mustn't stay, really, in that dressing-gown."

They look each other in the face. She knows that he is lying, and he knows she knows. But she has a dignity that will not descend to the vulgarity of cross-examination. "Very well," she says, and again turns, leaving him to the sting of his jealousy.

And it is not till nearly four that he hears, at last, the quick, breathless voice; hears its answering "Hullo!" in the casual tone of one who is happy and tired, and cannot be bothered at this late hour.

"What, you!" it says, "at this time. Where have you been gadding round?"

He keeps his dignity; he would not betray to her the secret of his long night's vigil. The tone of his voice as he replies to her is equally casual, equally pre-occupied. "A long sitting at the House," he says. "I've only just got back. I thought I'd ring up and say good-night."

"And I've only just got in, too."

"Really!"

" Yes ; dancing at Jack's, a studio affair, a jolly party. Everyone there, Sybil and Ernest, and Marjorie Cooper and Arthur Winston. Oh, and do you know I believe that Forster ménage is coming to an end. She was dancing with another man the whole evening ; rather funny, isn't it, after all we've said ? "

He agrees that it is funny, and listens for a few moments to the eager flow of talk. " Well, I expect you're tired," he says at last. " You've got a matinée to-morrow. I mustn't keep you up. *A bientot.*" And he hears the click of the receiver at the other end.

And next day they lunch together, and the wretched business begins again at the beginning. He daren't bring things to a head ; he daren't part with her. He daren't make sure, and it was with a strong man's love he won her.

How does it end ? If I were to attempt the conventional magazine short story I should have to contrive, I suppose, a dramatic climax. But things rarely happen like that, really. There is a working up to a point and a falling away from it. As spring passes into summer, so as one enthusiasm wanes another comes to take its place. We are never rid of our desires ; we change them, that is all.

> The life of all mortals in kissing should pass,
> Lip to lip while we're young, then the lip to the glass.

And of last love, as of second love and first love ; it passes calmly enough probably in the end. There will be an American tour, perhaps. And when she returns they will meet as friends. There will be no abrupt

severing, "*coupé net en plein ardeur.*" There will be a pause, and during it he will decide that the time has come for him to grow old decently. But anyway the end is unimportant. The emotional climax is reached on that night of jealousy, in the weakness of a strong man, in his desperate clinging to a waning ecstasy, his cowardice, his determination to know the truth, his pitiful desire to be deceived; and in the rallying of his dignity at the last moment, his refusal to be "gaga," to play "Père Goriot."

And it is because the climax of such a relationship comes then, that I have preferred to write of it in the form of an essay, rather than of a story; a short story must close on a dramatic curtain. And if a situation does not offer a dramatic curtain, it is wrong to make a story of it: it would be either a bad story because it would have no climax, or it would be an untrue story with the high light flung on a climax that was manufactured and incidental, instead of the significant, the universal moment, the hour of jealousy and self-contempt, the hour when a strong man sits before a telephone watching the second hand eat away the minutes.

It could be done, though, in a novel; it would make an admirable opening chapter to the story of a woman's life: it would have to be told probably through the woman's eyes; its early *motif* would be the arrogance of youth as it strides contemptuously over age. There would be the middle years of turmoil and success, and then the story would turn back upon itself. The woman would fall in love with a younger man and

would find herself, in her turn, being used as a stepping-stone for youth. And as she stands watching youth ride past her, she would know all that her early lover had known and suffered.

The love of a mature woman for a boy is a theme that has been used often enough, especially in French fiction, but never quite in this way, perhaps, never as a key to unlock the heart of a man's last love. But then it is a woman's theme perhaps rather than a man's; and we must remember always that, with the exception of some dozen books, the masterpieces of prose literature, and indeed of all literature and all art, are the work of a masculine intelligence. It may be that the contemporary women novelists are better than the contemporary men novelists. It may be that to the nineteen-eighties the great writers of the post-war period will be May Sinclair and Clemence Dane, and Rebecca West and Sheila Kaye-Smith. It may be, I do not know. I should myself doubt whether there is to-day a single woman writer, with the possible exception of Edith Wharton, who can begin to stand comparison with Thomas Hardy and George Moore, with Cavell, with Conrad, with Max Beerbohm, with Galsworthy, and with de la Mare. But one hesitates to dogmatise on living writers. This, at least, is sure. For many hundreds of years there have been pictures painted, and poetry written, and stories told. There have been a few writers of genius, and many painters, and poets, and musicians of great talent. There have been one or two minor poetesses, and there have been Jane Austen, and George Eliot,

and George Sand. Women have inspired books, but men have written them, written them, perhaps, I sometimes think, chiefly with the object of giving pleasure to woman, of making themselves attractive to her. The monkey and the West Indian savage woes its mate with dancing, and ornament, and display. The mediæval baron instituted tournaments and exhibitions of strength and courage. Art is the fine raiment in which the civilised man arrays himself before a woman. And it is, perhaps, because women have need of no such artifice that their contributions to the museum of the world's art have been so casual and so imponderable.

I believe that some such apologia has been made before, and I am half-inclined to feel that it was George Moore who made it. Certainly he has said somewhere that the most precious service that art has done to life is its exalting of an instinct into a revelation, its gorgeous apparelling of love. And whether or no he stressed the fact that it was a masculine achievement, it is a point certainly not to be disregarded by the critic of prose literature. For this is what it comes to, that the themes of the world's great stories are masculine. And it is only youth that can write honestly and convincingly of age.

We are under the spell always of what is distant from us. From the bondage of marriage we survey the raptures of free love. And from the deceit, the evasions, the premeditation of an intrigue we turn our eyes towards the decent pasturage of matrimony. Riot is as real to the virtuous, as virtue to the riotous.

It is experience that attracts innocence. And if a young man would write of last love, he has, in the love for him of a mature woman, the situation ready to his hand. There is no need for him to search further; it is thus that the story of youth and middle age is told to him. If he would write of a man's old age, would go beyond maturity, he would select some Père Goriot, some aspect of wronged senility, some Fouan or King Lear. And by the time that he has come himself to middle age, by the time that he has reached that borderland, the theme of age is, because he is no longer remote from it, unattractive. The ageing novelist returns to youth, and first love, and the raptures of spring. In "The Man of Property" Galsworthy told the story of mature, devastating passion; he was then at that point of balance of which Shakespeare wrote. But mature love, and the love of middle age for youth had, when he came to complete the Saga, ceased to appeal to him. The love of Jolyon for Irene is never actual to us; but of first love, of Val and Holly, of Jon and Fleur; of the hesitations, the blindness, the enrapturement of dawning love, he writes as few save Turgenev have ever written.

Youth means nothing to us when we are young. It is gold that we spend freely. We push past it towards the future. To-day is as indifferent to us as yesterday. We set out to write a book and we do not find out till we have finished it what we meant to say. We have lost interest in our book long before we have corrected the final proof. We are at work already on some new thing. We hardly pause to read the reviews

of the book that we handed to our publisher with such excitement six months earlier. What does it matter what they say about that book. We have got beyond it. It is a part of our dead self. We are living in to-morrow. People come up and say: "We like your last book," or "We don't think that your heroine would have fallen in love with that sort of man," or, "Do you think that he would really have behaved quite like that?" And we smile and we say, "Perhaps." But we are thinking of the new story that is shaping itself in our brain, the new story for which we have already prepared a series of brand-new note-books. I am always surprised when I find a writer of under forty genuinely depressed by his reviews. Surely he must know, I think, that all this is only his apprenticeship, that he is learning how to write, and that a generous public is financing his education. He has not begun yet.

And this book of which I am now writing the last pages: I have come down to the Albany, at Hastings, for a week to finish it. For five days I have scarcely spoken to a soul except to the waiter and the girl who brings me my shaving water and prepares my bath for me in the morning. I have shut myself up in my room all day, writing. I have enjoyed the writing of it more, I think, than that of any of my other books. But already, even before it is finished, it has begun to become a parcel of the past. Already I am living in to-morrow. I am thinking of the relief I shall feel on Saturday as I catch the 8.30 for Charing Cross: I am playing football against the Exiles. There will be

nothing on my mind as there was last week to mar the enjoyment of the match. I shall not afterwards have to rush away to catch an early train. I shall go with the rest of the team to de Hem's, and we shall dance our dance in Dansey Yard, and we shall toast our victory in pints of lukewarm ale, and by eleven o'clock we shall feel the world to be a very companionable spot. And on Monday morning I shall go back to the office, and at about eleven Douglas Goldring will drop in with the latest 1917 club scandal, and an enquiry about the sales of his new novel; but I shall be for once indifferent to 1917 club scandal. I shall tell him that since he saw me last I have written 20,000 words, and that for another month I do not propose to put pen to paper, and we shall discuss with what wines we are to heighten our enjoyment on Friday of *Polly* at the Kingsway. And in the evening, as I walk homewards up the North End Road, I shall notice the first signs of budding leaves, heralds of spring and sunshine, and the long June days. "Cricket is coming," I shall tell myself. The last Test Match in South Africa is over; only another month of football. It is high time that I was thinking of putting some oil on those old bats of mine. And now that my book is finished, my season's cricket, I shall remind myself, will be unharassed by financial worries. I shall play three times a week, and on the fourth sit at Lord's in the top gallery of the pavilion and watch Hearne and Hendren pile another double century on to their list of third-wicket partnerships.

And when summer is over and once again in mid-

September I take down from its shelf my red-and-white jersey and my studded boots; when these pages are with the booksellers and the critics, I shall be hard at work on another and, it is to be hoped, less unworthy book. To-day will be as dead then as yesterday is now. I shall be disappointed, naturally, if people do not like my book; but I shall not be broken-hearted. There is time in plenty.

But I also know that forty years from now, when the corner has been reached, when I have definitely turned my back upon the future,—the dull, uninteresting, unromantic future; the future that can bring me no new thing—when I have set out upon my second journey into the unknown, my journey "*à la recherche du temps perdu*"; when I shall try to recreate the past through an endless series of associations; the smell of wet stone that will recall to me the cloisters and high garden walls of Sherborne; the taste of cocoa that will recapture for me the depression of Sunday nights in the autumn of 1915 and the spring of 1916, when after an early dinner and a cup of cocoa I set out with my father to catch the last train from Euston back to camp; the sound of dance music, of "The Sheik" and "Honolulu Eyes"; the chance glimpses through a carriage window of a square-towered church, of the sudden aspect of sunlight on old stone; when, through the associated memory of taste and sight and smell and sense, I shall recompose that picture of all that my life has been and is not; then I know that I shall take down again from the shelf the books that I have written in the early twenties, and that they will possess for me

a significance that they have never had for me before, and they can have for no one else. They will be the spade with which I shall unearth the past.

I do not know what he will be like, the old man who, forty years from now, will read them ; what will be left to him of the thing that I now imagine to be myself. I do not know whether he will be sad or happy, married or single, rich or poor, lonely or befriended. I do not know what injuries the years may do to him, or what recompenses bring him. This only I know : with whatever else he parts he will never part with the books that he has written. And as he sits turning these pages at nightfall before his fire, he will find here once again the vigour, the turmoil, and the confidence of twenty-five.

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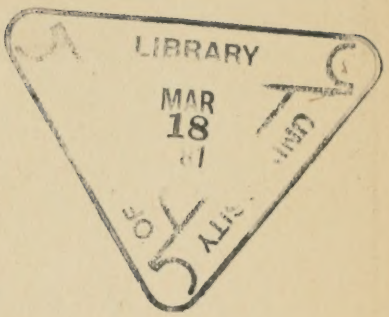
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